DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 436 311 PS 028 192

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Holliday, Albert E., Ed.; Holliday, Joan M., Ed. |
| TITLE | The Journal of Educational Relations, 1999. |
| INSTITUTION | Educational Communication Center, Camp Hill, PA. |
| ISSN | ISSN-0741-3653 |
| PUB DATE | 1999-00-00 |
| NOTE | 162p.; For 1998 edition, see ED 426 802. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Educational Communication Center, Box 657, Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657 (Individual rate, $48 per year, single copy, $15; library rate, $60 per year, single copy, $20; add $4 for subscriptions outside the United States; payment must be in U.S. funds). Tel: 800-537-2624 (Toll Free); Tel: 717-761-6620; outside U.S., 717-766-0574. |
| PUB TYPE | Collected Works - Serials (022) |
| JOURNAL CIT | Journal of Educational Relations; v20 n1-4 1999 |
| EDRS PRICE | EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Administrators; Educational History; Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; Family School Relationship; *Public Relations; School Administration; *School Community Relationship; Standardized Tests |
| IDENTIFIERS | Referendums |

ABSTRACT

This document consists of the four 1999 issues of the "Journal of Educational Relations," published quarterly to promote student achievement through positive school-home- community relationships. The articles in the first issue include: "The 10 Major Educational Events of the 20th Century in the United States" (Ben Brodinsky) and "The Administrative Portfolio: A Means To Document Achievement and Assess One's Career" (Curtis L. Guaglianone and Diane M. Yerkes). Articles in the second issue include: "Consider the Roles of Communication Related to School Violence/Crises" (Michelle Kirsche) and "Create Effective and Attractive School District-Community Newsletters" (Tobias Bruhn). Articles in the third issue include: "Consider These Techniques To Become a Proactive Principal" (Elaine K. McEwan) and "Education's Image in the New Millennium: One Debacle To Overcome" [standardized tests] (David Alan Gilman). Articles in the fourth issue include: "Passing Bond Referenda: Four Steps to Success" (Elaine Baker) and "Comprehensive Public Relations Requires a Team Approach" (Doug Otto and Carole Greisdorf). Each issue also contains a teaching or administrative case study and response, book reviews, and articles in which educators share insights regarding improvements in school-community relations. (HTH)

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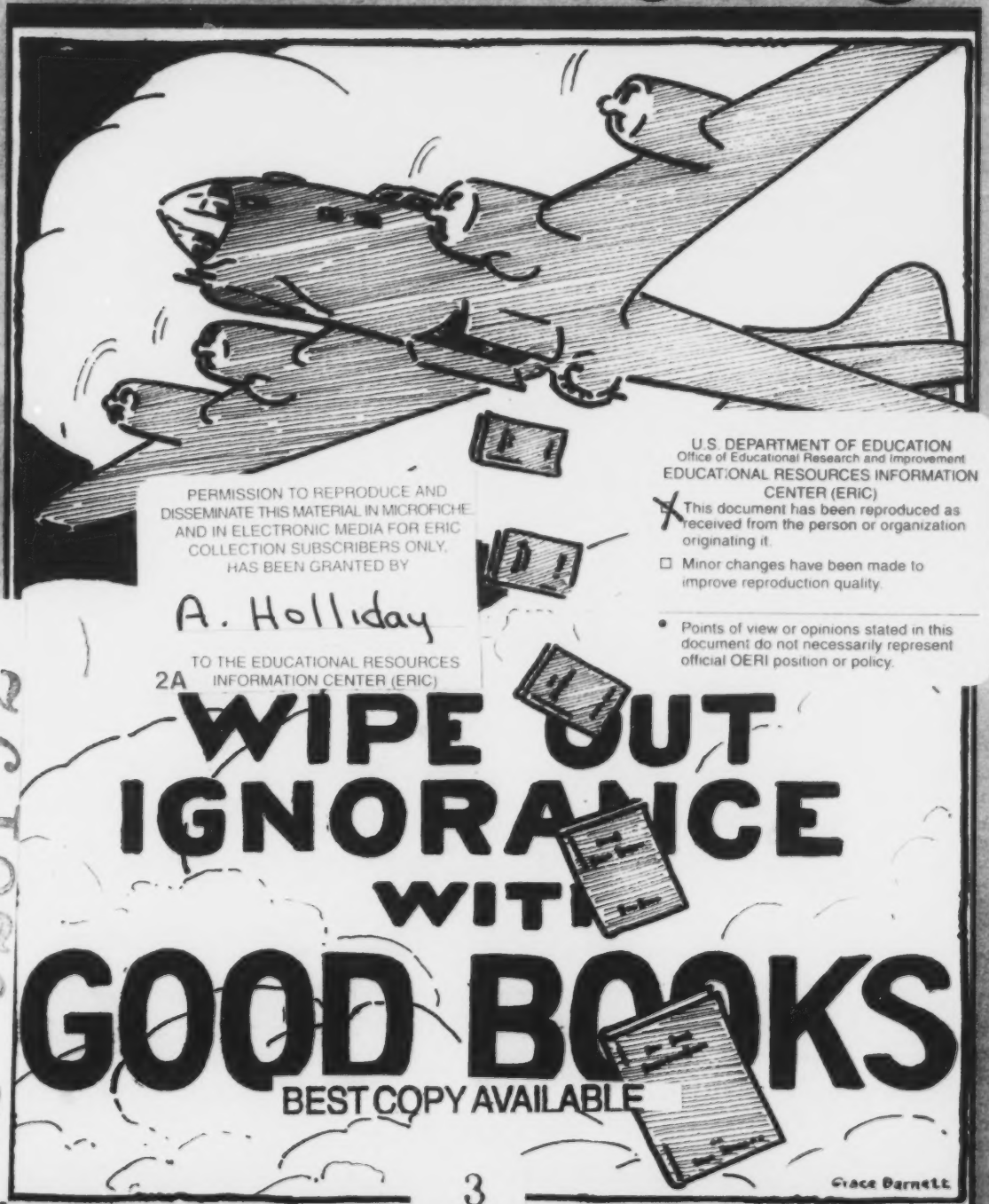


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Promoting student achievement through positive school-home-community relationships • Vol. 20 No. 1, 1st Quarter 1999

## Ben Reviews the Century's Events

Ben Brodinsky, a former president of the Education Press Association, was so kind to send us his review of the 10 major educational events of this century. These 100 years have seen the field of public education mature in scope and approach. At a time when the quality and future nature of public schooling is under analysis, it is appropriate to step back and review the major highlights of actions that have had a significant impact in all of our lives.

## We Begin the 25th Year of Publication

The year 1999 is the 25th year of producing this *Journal*. We started in 1975 with the title *Journal of Educational Communications*. Our current title was selected to represent the relationship factors that must be at the heart of any communication between people in a school and among home, community and school.

The publication road was rocky at times—hence 20 volumes over a 25-year period.

We do have a few surprises in store for subscribers/readers in 1999 and beyond. And we always welcome reader suggestions and comments.

## References to Others Sought

Unlike most education journals, this one is not supported by an association, foundation or advertisers.

Our only support is from paid subscribers. While our renewal rate is high, we do lose 15-20 percent of subscribers each year because of retirements, budget-cutbacks, personnel changes, etc. And the costs of direct mail to replace these subscribers are beyond reasonable limits.

We would greatly appreciate your reference of people (with titles and addresses) who may find the *Journal* of value. We will send them recent editions as samples.

And thank you for your support.

Al Holliday

### Free Workshop Available

The editor-publisher will conduct a workshop on the topic "Communication for Survival of Your Public Schools in the '00 Decade."

The half-day workshop is available for teams of staff members in a school district and/or members of an intermediate unit. Participants can number from 25 to 60 people (a requirement of participation of each person will be completion of a three-page survey/status form).

The workshop is conducted free of charge–the sponsor(s) must pay only for expenses associated with the workshop including travel.

Topics covered during the session will include: Is "Marketing" your schools realistic in your area?, Why are so many educators "timid" communicators?, Five PR mistakes you should avoid, Who are the people in your community who "count" more than others?, Is assigning PR tasks reasonable for administrators? For teachers? For custodians?, Seven communication techniques/processes that give you the most positive payoff.

Each team of participants will develop a short- and long-range communication plan for their school/district, as may be appropriate.

Call Al Holliday (717-761-6620) for details and to reserve a time for a workshop.

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RELATIONS-The Journal of Educational Relations—ISSN 0741-3653
Editor-in-chief: Albert E. Holliday • Associate Editor: Joan M. Holliday
Book reviews: Arthur W. Steller

The Journal of Educational Relations is published quarterly by the Educational Communication Center, Box 657, Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657. Telephone 717-761-6620. • Copyright 1999.

Subscriptions: Individual rate, $48 per year. Single copy, $15.
Library rate, $60 per year. Single copy, $20.
Add $4 for subscriptions outside of the United States.
Payment in U.S. funds.

Periodicals postage paid at Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Journal of Educational Relations*, P.O. Box 657, Camp Hill PA 17001-0657.

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# The 10 Major Educational Events of the 20th Century in the United States

A selection by Ben Brodinsky

**1.** Just after World War II ended in 1945, Congress enacted the G.I. Bill of Rights, with far-reaching and far-ranging results. Millions of young men and women who had served in the Armed Forces were helped toward new career and professional goals through a variety of schooling and college training. America's educational institutions, too, were invigorated in the process.

Known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, the bill was passed unanimously. Its impact was immediate. Veterans flocked to the nation's campuses, overcrowding classrooms as they enrolled in every conceivable course, from shoe repair to electronics. Veterans were guaranteed tuition, monthly subsistence, family allotments and text-books.

Over the years, G.I. educational benefits were extended to veterans of the Korean conflict (early 1950s), of the Vietnam era (mid-1960s to early 1970s), and all military engagements since. By the end of the century, the program had assisted more than 20.7 million individuals, at a cost of $71 billion, to obtain college educations and degrees.

**2.** The U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously (1954) that the forced separation of students in public school by race was unconstitutional. The court ordered the integration of schools "with all deliberate speed."

During the past half century, historic patterns marked the educational scene as a result of the high court's action. Officials in some southern school districts immediately accepted integration. Others closed their public schools and created private schools, with private funds, to keep student enrollments all white. Later, judges and school boards adopted a variety of schemes to transport students from all white and/or all black neighborhoods to neighboring schools to achieve a mixture of the races of students and faculty. The most surprising results of the Supreme Court's ruling was that racial segregation, in effect, came into being in primarily non-southern schools–in Boston, Hartford, Chicago, Kansas City, Denver, San Francisco. But few districts–whether North, East, South or West–were able to avoid the pains stemming from efforts of integration.

**3.** Congress decided (1975) that all handicapped students in public schools are entitled to all educational services from which they can benefit, and that schools must provide them at public expense. The term "handicapped" was broadened to include physical,

mental, emotional and learning disabilities.

Throughout history, the handicapped person, with rare exception, had been relegated to snake pits, ignored, abused and punished. Under the new law, Education of All Handicapped Act, public attention, public funds and public sympathy were to be focused on the handicapped.

During the first 25 years of the law, results were not visibly effective. Officials of public schools turned to Congress: "Give us the money and we'll try to do the job." And the job was enormous. It required identifying various types of handicapped young people, creating learning activities for each type, and finding teachers who could help the children. But very few federal, state and local funds were forthcoming. At most the federal government paid for research and demonstration projects and for model instructional materials.

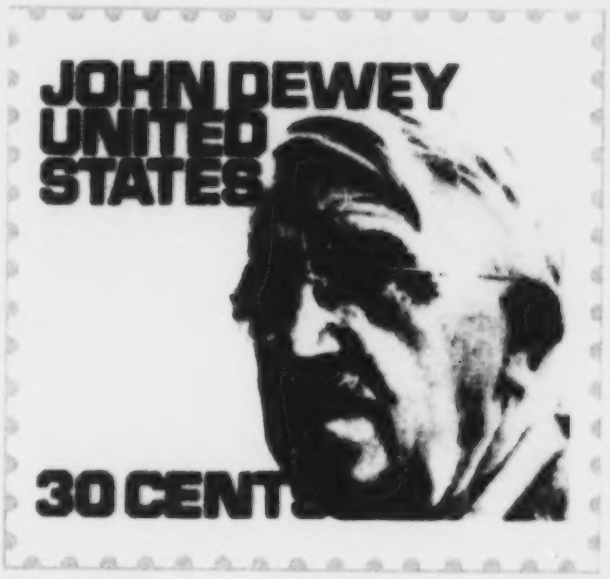
Whatever help is to come to the handicapped will emerge in battles that will take place in the 21st Century.

**4.** Uncle Sam moved into classrooms, into the school-board rooms and administrative offices. And into the school cafeteria.

One hundred years ago, American education was primarily a local activity, funded by local resources. During the past century, officials in the federal executive, legislative and judicial branches have made indelible changes.

Today, the federal government is funding milk, breakfast and lunch for millions of school children. Student rights are protected under standards set by the United States Supreme Court. Student loans help thousands to continue their college education. Federal surplus property often provides much needed school equipment. Native American school children benefit from guidance and funds provided by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. And in a bold and controversial move by Congress and administration officials, school officials have been asked to gear up for Goals 2000, to create a matchless system of public schools to be the envy of the world.

Says Harold Howe Jr., a former U.S. Commissioner of Education: "The presence of Uncle Sam in the back of the classroom may be more of a problem for educators than they had counted on."




**5.** John Dewey (1859-1952), philosopher, writer and activist, spread his influence in the United States and the world. His major work, *Democracy and Education*, was published in 1916, and remains one of the most quoted works in education. It has also been one of the most revered, as well as misunderstood and condemned, texts.

As a village school teacher in his native Vermont, Dewey knew the blank faces and minds of children who sat through and perhaps listened while most teachers droned on. He sensed there were better ways to prepare youngsters for their life ahead. His edu-

cational focus was on action, experience and learning by doing. During his long life, Dewey saw his ideas called pragmatism, instrumentalism, progressive education. Educators in the next century may continue the search for Dewey's concept of teaching and learning.

**6.** Testing, testing, testing. These were educators' marching orders of the century. The origins of testing date to the first World War (1914-1918), when the Army sought ways to classify men for appropriate military duty. Inspired by Alfred Binet (1859-1911) in France, the young psychologists who had been mustered for the task looked beyond military testing after the war. They turned to testing and its results as a means to find new ways to provide appropriate school tasks for students. They saw that tests could be used as a democratic way for grouping children on the basis of their intellectual abilities instead of by birth or wealth.

Testing attracted able scholars and researchers–Lewis Terman (1877-1956) and Edward Thorndike (1874-1949), for example. The research of these scientists brought the Intelligence Quotient–IQ–for better or for worse. The Educational Testing Service came into being, at Princeton, N.J., promoting testing as a mass industry. The nation's schools were engulfed by tests, devised by classroom teachers, district officials, subject-matter specialists, commercial companies and research agencies. Results of Scholastic Aptitude Tests governed admittance of many young people into college. Test results were considered a prop for global superiority in the world market place.

Testing became a panacea and a passion. However, in recent years, criticism of the testing movement has come into the limelight. One widely reputed objection: tests are geared to upper-class students, and against the poor. The higher the family income, the arguments ran, the higher is likely to be the student's scores. By the century's end, testing and test results have begun to lose some of their luster.

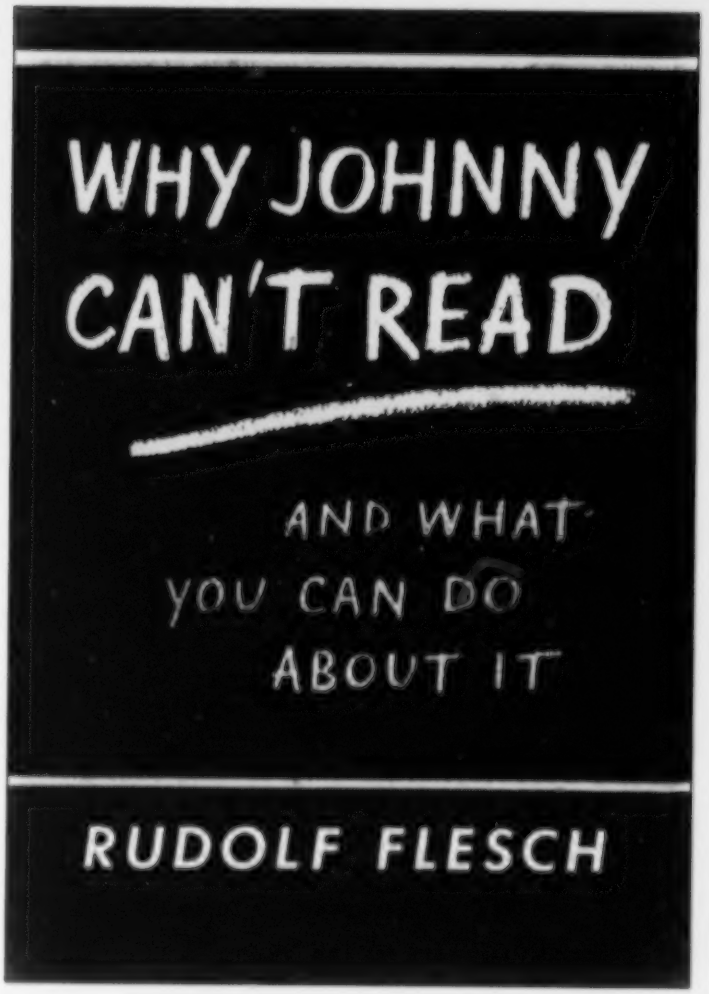
**7.** How to teach students to read was mired in a century-long debate. Advocates of phonics were pitted against those who believed that using the entire language was the best reading instruction method.

In 1953, Rudolph Flesch published *Why Johnny Can't Read*, placing the blame on inchoate teaching methods and urging a strict phonics approach. The book stirred wide discussion, but did not convince most educators to adopt phonics as the prime teaching method.

One result came to the fore: research studies favoring and opposing different reading instruction methods poured out in unprecedented volume. Educational journals contained millions of words on the subject. Conferences and conventions attracted large audiences on reading instruction. The years did not bring a letup. Research results did not seem to make a difference. Educators taught reading as they saw fit. Principals dictated reading methods as they had been taught; and teachers followed their own traditions.

As the year 2000 approaches, the raging debates seem to diminish. The prevailing view was that for some students, at certain times, phonics may be useful; and that the whole language approach has its uses, as teachers see the need for it.

**8.** Computers came into the classroom in the 1950s and they are still arriving. The first computers were delivered to schools with fanfare and expectations that here was an instrument of invigorating teaching and learning. Countless youngsters quickly became expert at dabbling with the device. Teachers had to learn computer skills–often




from students.

After nearly half a century, some educators are having notable success in using the computer for improved instruction in science, social studies, mathematics and career guidance. But the majority of teachers are still not competent in computer skills. As a result, thousands of the instruments are gathering dust in school closets.

A study by the Educational Testing Service in 1998 showed that the $5 billion spent each year for computers is actually hurting children's learning because of poor use.

The beneficence of the computer in schools is a matter for the 21st century.

**9.** Teachers changed their profession from a timid, exploited enterprise to a bold, assertive national force. The National Education Association, which claimed to represent America's teachers, dropped the facade of being a "professional" organization and announced itself a labor union, geared to lobbying Congress and state legislators.

One force that moved teachers in the new direction was emergence of the American Federation of Teachers, affiliated with the AFL-CIO. This group was led by Albert Shanker, a rare personality combining vision with combative impulse. During Shanker's lifetime, efforts were made to merge the NEA with the AFT. Merger efforts were not successful as the end of the century approached.

**10.** The American public high school, unique on the face of the earth, exploded in scope and influence. The institution had had a hard time coming into its own. Although the first public high school was established in Boston in 1821, free secondary schooling was opposed for decades as an unwise expenditure of public money. Organized labor favored it, but taxpayer groups opposed it.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the public high school enrolled only 699,000 students, or 11 percent, of all youth eligible to attend. Then, with startling speed, high school enrollments more than quadrupled between 1910 and 1930. By 1940, the high school included three-fourths of all eligible youngsters. And as the century came to an end, more than 13 million were in public grades 9 through 12. (Enrollments in private high schools

reached 1.3 million.)

Courses offered in public high schools also exploded in number and variety. From a meager dozen of classical offerings, the high school, by the end of the century, offered a smorgasbord of hundreds of compulsory and elective courses. Since 1917, the high school was further enriched by courses in industrial arts, home economics, agriculture and business, paid in part by the Smith-Hughes and subsequent Federal grants.

In summary, the 20th Century featured new eras of mass education as a majority of our young people attended kindergarten through high school, and almost half continued to higher education. Discriminatory practices in schools, especially those aimed at students other than white ones and those with handicaps, were designated for elimination. Federal legislation was enacted to benefit growing numbers of students in schools and colleges. Students were treated to a variety of testing and teaching processes, while the computer was a late addition to classrooms. And, teachers and other educators joined in militant behaviors, which gained them increased job security and compensation for their efforts.



**Ben Brodinsky, a graduate of the Universities of Delaware and Pennsylvania, was editor-in-chief of Croft Educational Services. Croft produced a variety of newsletters and resource materials for teachers and administrators a few decades ago. He is a past president and an honorary life member of EdPress of America. For the past 45 years, his recounting of the major educational events of the prior 12 months has been an annual feature in many education publications. For this analysis, he points to the most significant education events of the century. His mailing address is 327 Seabury Dr., Bloomfield, CT 06002.**

**Editor's Note:**

What do you believe will be the most noteworthy advances in education during the new millennium? Send your suggestions –one or all 10–to me by June 1, 1999, for inclusion in a "Predictions" article in our 4th Quarter 1999 edition.

*One repays a teacher badly if one always remains just a pupil.*

*Nietzsche*

# Bridge A People Gap By Calling on Volunteers

## Retired educators should be considered

by Jonathan Pearce

The people who run our schools do their best with what basic and supplementary resources they've been allotted. But it's evident from their almost universal cries of anguish that our schools need additional help. Despite state and federal supplements designed to help fund the now-numerous special mandates, officials of many school organizations complain of not having nearly enough people, time, and funds to accomplish their now bloated mission.

Even so, Americans expect their public schools to take up ever more of society's burdens or face the consequences of more "taxpayer revolt." Whereas it is true that in recent years some schools have suffered a disconnection from their support among the general public, there are nevertheless indications that the use of unpaid workers–volunteers–who do not replace paid employees might provide schools with useful assistance.

### Volunteers can provide significant help

A gap is evident when what the public expects is not met because professionals in service are handicapped with limited resources. Volunteers can bridge part of that gap.

In many communities–urban, suburban, rural–volunteers already provide some useful assistance in public agencies.

However, adult volunteers seem to be in short supply in schools. Perhaps they have not been actively or effectively recruited. Perhaps the volunteers who show up are not made to feel welcome. Perhaps they do not receive necessary training.

One might assume that volunteers would surface aplenty in big-city schools, as the perceived shortcomings of those schools are so loudly trumpeted in all the media. But closely viewed, urban school staffs are as challenged by the weight of work and the shortage of time as the teacher in any rustic one-room schoolhouse. For whatever reasons, volunteers more often do not appear in big-city schools and/or do not stay long.

It is probably the small to medium-size suburban or rural school district–1,500-10,000 students–in which the organization itself is best suited to maintain an ongoing volunteer system. Perhaps that is because in such communities the schools are likely to be still considered among important civic enterprises, a public opinion that many people in big-city schools may have lost.

## Volunteers need strong support and a clear mission

School volunteers emerge from a variety of backgrounds: retired military, business and professional people, grandparents. But it seems obvious that the volunteers who emerge from among the ranks of retired educators are likely to provide the most expert service in schools.

However, whatever the background of the volunteers, their service is likely to be sustainable over time only if their mission is clear, if their support is visible, and if their training for the specific job is competent. It may also make a difference if the volunteers feel a fidelity to and strong connection with the institution to which they have volunteered their services.

## "Feeling special" promotes loyalty to the organization

Ask a combat veteran of the United States Marine Corps, "When were you a marine?" The veteran will likely say, "I'm still a marine inside here." Service in the Marine Corps seems to have this effect on its veterans, male and female alike. Perhaps it has something to do with the feeling of the specialness of that service.

Former and retired teachers and administrators often have similar feeling of specialness. This specialness can be tapped among those retirees when representatives of their former schools and districts have made an effort to demonstrate their respect and con-

## Schools and School Districts Use Retiree Volunteer Services to

- Demonstrate an art, craft, skill
- Tutor in classrooms and/or Internet
- Aid in classrooms
- Tell stories in classrooms
- Assist in school libraries
- Serve as crossing guards
- Organize alumni activities
- Design/build campus beautification projects
- Present school information at service clubs
- Assist in liaison with parent groups
- Serve on advisory committees
- Chaperone school activities
- Monitor schoolbus ambience
- Review school and district policies
- Critique schoolhouse-planning projects
- Provide long-term stability to booster groups
- Mentor new employees
- Help secretaries and receptionists
- Lobby local and state government
- Recruit other retirees to participate
- Conduct inservice training for teachers
- Collect school histories
- Track graduate whereabouts and achievements
- Survey taxpayer attitudes
- "Interpret" the schools to non-educators
- Provide "counselor associate" services
- Help coach athletics, speech, music, dramatics, art, student publications

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cern for them. The most successful volunteers are those on whom the organization has continued to bestow some tokens of respect and appreciation.

## Invite volunteers

Studies suggest that potential volunteers must be invited to serve. The invitations need to be carefully composed and directed. Potential volunteers can be identified from an organization's own list of retirees, and also from among the residents of nearby retirement communities. School representatives need to review tax lists, survey real estate agents, and actively seek out individuals who qualify.

If it seems obvious that people generally enjoy invitations, it is a likely corollary that people do not enjoy rejection. The invitation to volunteer must be clear solicitation, as individualized and explicit as possible, complimentary, and based on a preliminary judgment that the candidate is fit and appropriate for the job. Broad "Y'all come" invitations in the media are not recommended as these may attract people who are no longer suited for tasks in schools.

### Volunteers need not have been professional educators

The retired employee volunteer pool need not be limited to retirees from the certificated service, but might well include the classified service.

Consider bus drivers, members of schoolboards/committees, cafeteria workers, campus/playground safety and security supervisors, clerks, coaches, counselors, secretaries, others. Of course, the more diverse the composition of the potential volunteer pool, the more careful the training and placement and evaluation procedures must be.

## Screen and train with care

An organization serving children and youth cannot afford to welcome as a "volunteer" every person who is agreeable to such service, regardless of the source of the person's interest. An evaluation screen must be established through which the proposed volunteer passes before being officially accepted and trained. Several steps and more than one person should be involved in the screening process. Care must be taken to fit each person to a specific job. Although subjecting the candidates to such scrutiny may be time-consuming to schools and annoying to the prospective volunteers, the process is necessary for public perception of the organization's integrity.

School representatives must then orient and train the aides specifically to the tasks they are to perform, and about what is expected of the volunteer performers.

## Retraining may be difficult

It may not be easy for some retired educators who must submit to retraining. In most cases, the tasks of the volunteer in the new school setting will be quite different than the person's tasks as a paid employee, and the person will need to be oriented to present needs and requirements.

We seem to be flogging the obvious here. However, so many admirable projects have failed because critical training phases were skipped. In these cases, someone erred in assuming that "these folk are teachers, and it's insulting to tell teachers they don't know how to perform an education-related task."

Appropriate policies and rules and training activities must be in place before a volunteer walks onto the job site.


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### Before Recruiting Volunteers, Officials Need to Plan

✓ Made a needs assessment to determine readiness?

✓ Is program likely to be worthwhile, productive?

✓ If so, is it worth funding?

✓ Who is to be in charge?

✓ Has that person skills to guide both recruiting & training?

✓ Has leader the trust & confidence of teachers & leadership?

✓ A reasonable volunteer-training budget?

✓ Objectives defined for the volunteers?

✓ Are larger organizational priorities addressed?

✓ Legal issues been considered, resolution approved?

✓ Screening/selection process defined, activated?

✓ Content of the training curriculum defined?

✓ Who shall devise that curriculum?

✓ Who shall do the training?

✓ Who shall evaluate the training & trainer(s)?

✓ Who is responsible to decide a volunteer is ready to work?

✓ How shall the volunteers be monitored & evaluated?

✓ How shall their services be recognized & rewarded?

## A volunteer program may stimulate objections

Resistance to volunteer programs may arise. Some folks resist any change. Teachers themselves sometime object to having to monitor another person in the classroom. Resistance might be simply a byproduct of entropy, the feeling oldtimers complain of, wherein any odd new task is another burden.

Administrators may express concern that volunteers may not be appropriately responsive to bulletins and memoranda. Representatives of parent groups may be concerned that volunteers will provide substandard classroom fare.

It is possible to deal with all such objections gracefully, provided they are anticipated, planned for, and timely responses made to the complainants.

No labor union is likely to support an effort to replace presently paid jobs with volunteers. However, union members may respond well to consultation in such cases wherein their members receive volunteered supplementary assistance in, for example, an art docent program organized so that knowledgeable and well-trained volunteers might provide art awareness to children as a supplement to the classroom teacher's efforts. A library volunteer effort might be applauded in which volunteers help in shelving books, reading to small groups, and assisting with clerical procedures. Tutors available to work with children one on one are usually welcomed.

## Basic questions may need attention

A school board may ponder whether to continue funding a fine arts program or, instead, solicit volunteers to staff such an effort. Such an issue is invariably related to finance and is unfortunately more common than rare today; the budget-cutting objects are often music and art. (The question itself is puzzling to most European, South American, African, and Asian educators, for

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## How to Stimulate Interest of Retired Educators

- ✓ Designate an official liaison person
- ✓ Survey opinions periodically
- ✓ Create a retiree newsletter
- ✓ Include on school mailing lists
- ✓ Provide passes or reduced admission
- ✓ Recognize significant professional anniversaries
- ✓ Select retirees to preside over ceremonies
- ✓ Establish a welcoming climate
- ✓ Identify volunteer opportunities
- ✓ Recruit systematically
- ✓ Provide specific expectations for performance
- ✓ Train systematically
- ✓ Inform as to organizational goals and priorities
- ✓ Provide law & regulation updates
- ✓ Recognize & publicly celebrate volunteer service

in much of their scholastic worlds the fine arts are considered as "basic" to the welfare of children as arithmetic.)

If, because of a budget pinch, the music program is dropped, should a volunteer be sought to deliver occasional music services? Could such service be regular and systematic? Or can alternative solutions be created? An issue like this may involve not only a labor relations problem, but also must involve basic questions about elements necessary to comprise "education" today. Such puzzling questions need to be addressed sooner or later. In the meanwhile, they should not delay or destroy the building of a volunteer program to serve areas not otherwise affected.

## Volunteering must be–and appear to be–rewarding

Volunteering in schools must be made attractive, even fashionable, and felt by the volunteers as intrinsically rewarding. Those retirees who remain in the same district in which they worked may find it daunting to visit a school several years post-retirement. The people in the office are inevitably younger, their greeting couched in the courteous but restrained responses of busy people wondering what the visitor wants of them.

Those who operate successful school volunteer programs take steps to anticipate such perceptions. They:

- •Broadcast a vision of the "product" desired
- •Define a systematic approach to reaching their goals
- •Expect mutual support and cooperation among all elements
- •Promote visible leadership
- •Reward loyal followership
- •Produce clear public information releases
- •Bestow extrinsic rewards to accompany the intrinsic ones.

Intrinsic rewards include the appreciation often voiced and otherwise illustrated by the children and youth and professional staff whom the volunteer is assisting. Volunteers may take great joy in simply being demonstrably useful and productive, perhaps after a period of relative idleness. The very first volunteer project to be organized might be designed to send enthusiastic volunteers back into the community to promote the joys of education in the volunteer-organizing school. Such a project would seem to promote its own intrinsic reward.





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But if volunteers are expected to continue for any length of time, their services need tangible recognition.

Transportation provided by the school to and from the workplace could constitute an expense, but might serve as both incentive and appropriate extrinsic reward for service.

Plaques and loving cups may be appreciated, especially if the names are correctly spelled and if the recipient has enough space on the mantel.

Certificates are enjoyable when presented already framed.

A volunteer may consider it a significant personal recognition to be one of the diploma presenters at a graduation ceremony.

Presentation of any recognition should be made in as public a forum as possible by presenters of high status. If the honors are featured in the local press or television, so much the better for the future of the volunteer program.

Successful volunteer programs seem to generate great good will for the schools when the public perceives that school and/or district officials honor their volunteers. Demonstrations of respect for volunteers also transmit an excellent message for would-be teachers among the school's students.

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# Report Cards–

# How to make sure the ones in your district receive an *A*

## Introduction

by Al Holliday

*Report cards traditionally have been one, in some cases the only, means used by teachers to record the levels of achievement by students. The cards are then given to students and their parents, with the base information stored in students' permanent records at the school.*

*One would think that, by the end of the 20th Century, educators across North America would have come to use a standardized reporting card. Such a card, by definition, should easily and clearly indicate the scope of an individual child's performance, and even suggest, as necessary, what a student might do to improve in certain respects.*

*Unfortunately, educators in our 15,000 school districts appear to go their own ways, and not so well either. What an A or D means may not be clearly stated. Some cards define terms, others have no definitions.*

*This situation prompted the authors of this article to conduct research to learn what is necessary for school officials to develop report card formats that serve their purpose as well as possible.*

*Note that this article deals mainly with middle and high school cards.*

*Officials in a district or school might wish to share this content with a committee of staff and parents to see what, if any, changes in current cards may be appropriate.*

By Stephen J. Friedman and David A. Frisbie

Which factors might be considered when grading the report card a school uses to communicate student performance to parents or guardians? Our analysis of a wide variety of report cards has led us to two key factors: 1, having clearly defined symbols for achievement and other student traits, and 2, having enough different symbols available so that distinctions among levels of student performance can be made. In addition, one must assess how computer preparation and physical size of the document can influence the interpretability of the information being communicated.

We offer specific recommendations to those wishing to improve their report cards drawing on information gathered in a study we conducted recently.[1] In that study, we dealt with report cards across all levels (K-12) from a validity perspective; in this article, we focus mainly on the findings that will assist practitioners at the middle and high school levels. This is an especially critical issue at these levels because there tends to be less interaction between parents and school personnel compared to the elementary level. The report card thus becomes an espe-

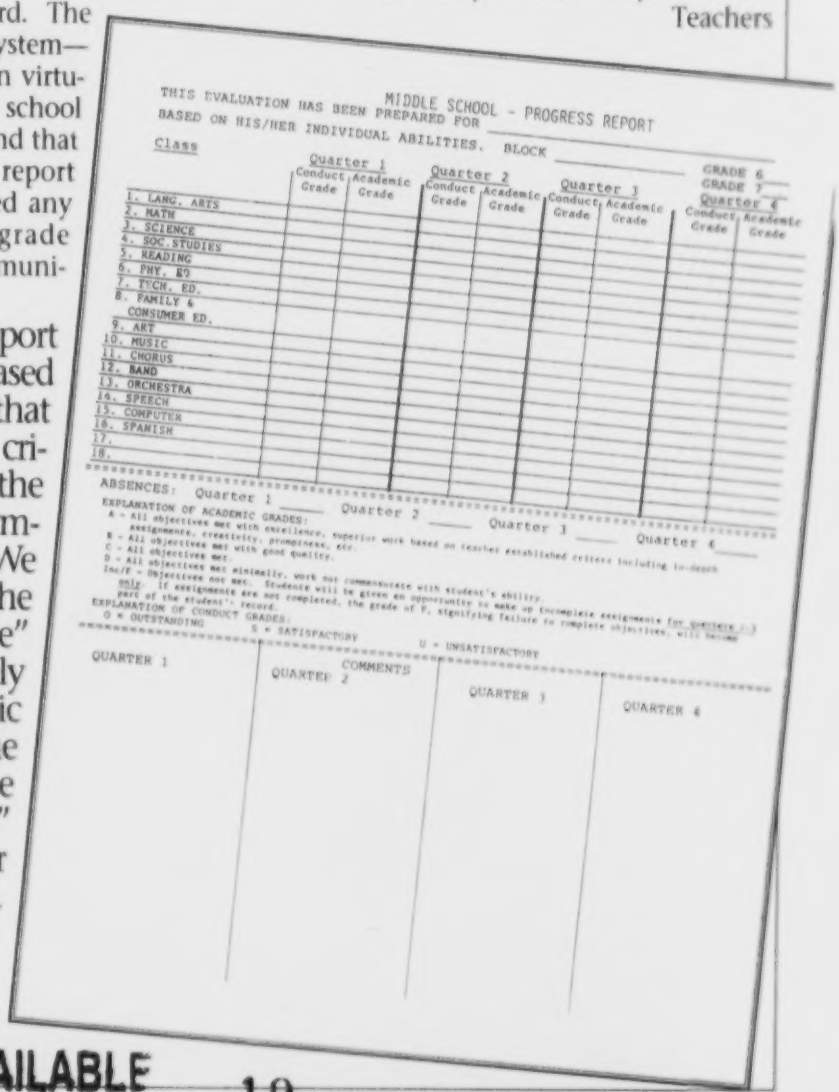
cially critical liaison between home and school.

The examples we use were taken from a sample of report cards used in the 1995 study of about half of the 428 school districts in Wisconsin whose officials submitted their report cards from all grade levels to us.

## Are Academic Grade Symbols Clearly Defined?

One of the two most significant issues we identified was the clarity with which the achievement symbols are defined on the report card. The traditional letter grade system—A, B, C, etc.—is found on virtually all middle and high school report cards. But we found that 36% and 77% of those report cards, respectively, lacked any definitions for those grade symbols. This is a communication issue because the assumption is that those receiving the report card grades will have a shared understanding of what the letters mean. However, there is evidence from at least one study that the meaning parents conclude is not necessarily the same as that intended by the teacher who assigned the grade.[2] Communication was muddled.

For most teachers, grades show how much of the important knowledge or how many skills students possess. In this case, an "A" might mean "excellent," "highly competent," or "exceptionally prepared for further study in the subject area." Teachers



MIDDLE SCHOOL - PROGRESS REPORT

THIS EVALUATION HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR _____ GRADE 6 ____
BASED ON HIS/HER INDIVIDUAL ABILITIES. BLOCK _____ GRADE 7 ____
Class

| | Quarter 1 | | Quarter 2 | | Quarter 3 | | Quarter 4 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Conduct Grade | Academic Grade | Conduct Grade | Academic Grade | Conduct Grade | Academic Grade | Conduct Grade | Academic Grade |
| 1. LANG. ARTS | | | | | | | | |
| 2. MATH | | | | | | | | |
| 3. SCIENCE | | | | | | | | |
| 4. SOC. STUDIES | | | | | | | | |
| 5. READING | | | | | | | | |
| 6. PHY. ED | | | | | | | | |
| 7. TECH. ED. | | | | | | | | |
| 8. FAMILY & CONSUMER ED. | | | | | | | | |
| 9. ART | | | | | | | | |
| 10. MUSIC | | | | | | | | |
| 11. CHORUS | | | | | | | | |
| 12. BAND | | | | | | | | |
| 13. ORCHESTRA | | | | | | | | |
| 14. SPEECH | | | | | | | | |
| 15. COMPUTER | | | | | | | | |
| 16. SPANISH | | | | | | | | |
| 17. | | | | | | | | |
| 18. | | | | | | | | |

ABSENCES: Quarter 1 ____ Quarter 2 ____ Quarter 3 ____ Quarter 4 ____

EXPLANATION OF ACADEMIC GRADES:
A = All objectives met with excellence, superior work based on teacher established criteria including in-depth assignments, creativity, promptness, etc.
B = All objectives met with good quality.
C = All objectives met.
D = All objectives met minimally, work not commensurate with student's ability.
Inc/E = Objectives not met. Students will be given an opportunity to make up incomplete assignments for quarters 1-3 only. If assignments are not completed, the grade of F, signifying failure to complete objectives, will become part of the student's record.

EXPLANATION OF CONDUCT GRADES:
O = OUTSTANDING S = SATISFACTORY U = UNSATISFACTORY

COMMENTS

QUARTER 1 | QUARTER 2 | QUARTER 3 | QUARTER 4

**Figure 1**—On this report card, the grades are based on the degree that "teacher established criteria" are met, and the descriptions of the symbols are fairly clear. We like seeing the "Conduct Grade" reported separately from the "Academic Grade", though the symbols used for the "Conduct Grades" could be better explained.

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develop a set of performance standards when they assign grades that are interpreted in this manner. However, other approaches are possible. Teachers might use the average performance of a class (or set of classes) as a benchmark for assigning grades. Here, an "A" might mean "well above average," "among the highest in the class," or "one of the highest achievers."

We found a few examples of scales that were relatively well defined. Several schools used the following:

A=Superior performance
B=Above Average
C=Average
D=Below average
F=Failure

## What Standards Are Used for Grading?

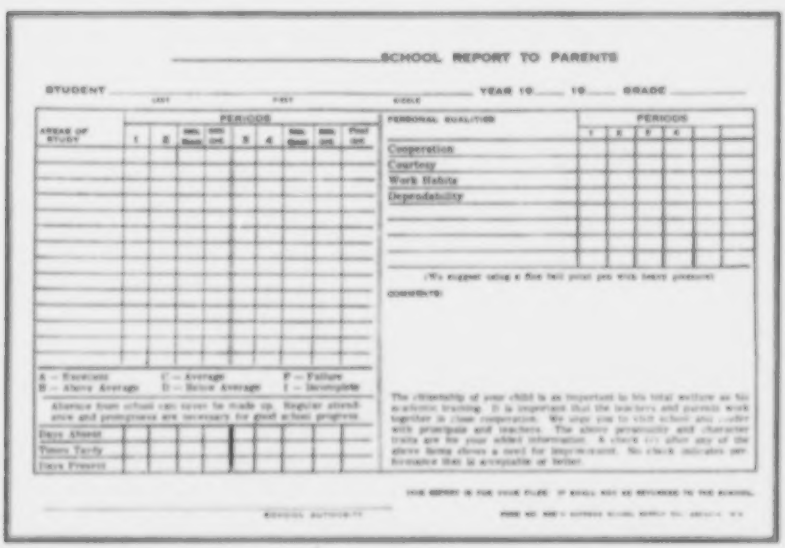
It seems fairly clear the meaning of each grade is based on a comparison to how other students performed. But which students? The comparison group is probably the rest of the students in the teacher's class, but it could be all students in all of the sections of that class from the same teacher or all students taking that same class from several teachers during the same year. If the grade means something based on a comparison to how well other students performed, then it would be most ideal if the comparison group were identified—i.e. A=Superior performance compared to the students enrolled in this section.

With the current trend toward monitoring competency and establishing performance standards, the grading scale described above seems unsuitable for most schools; instead, it should indicate the extent to which students have mastered certain knowledge/skills according to district or state standards. How other students performed ought to be less of an issue. It is important that the symbol definitions reflect the district's current educational philosophy.

A scale frequently found on report cards that implies that a certain amount of the content has been mastered is a percentage grading scale:

A=100-94
B=93-88
C=87-76
D=75-70
F=Below 70

But a percent score of 87, for example, in this system seldom means that the student knows 87 percent of the important


SCHOOL REPORT TO PARENTS

STUDENT _____ YEAR 19__ TO 19__ GRADE _____

| AREAS OF STUDY | PERIODS 1 | 2 | Mid-Term | Mid-Year | 3 | 4 | Mid-Term | Mid-Year | Final Ave. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | |
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| PERSONAL QUALITIES | PERIODS 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cooperation | | | | | | |
| Courtesy | | | | | | |
| Work Habits | | | | | | |
| Dependability | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

(We suggest using a fine tip pen with heavy pressure)

COMMENTS:

A – Excellent C – Average F – Failure
B – Above Average D – Below Average I – Incomplete

Absence from school can never be made up. Regular attendance and promptness are necessary for good school progress.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Days Absent | | | | | | | | | |
| Times Tardy | | | | | | | | | |
| Days Present | | | | | | | | | |

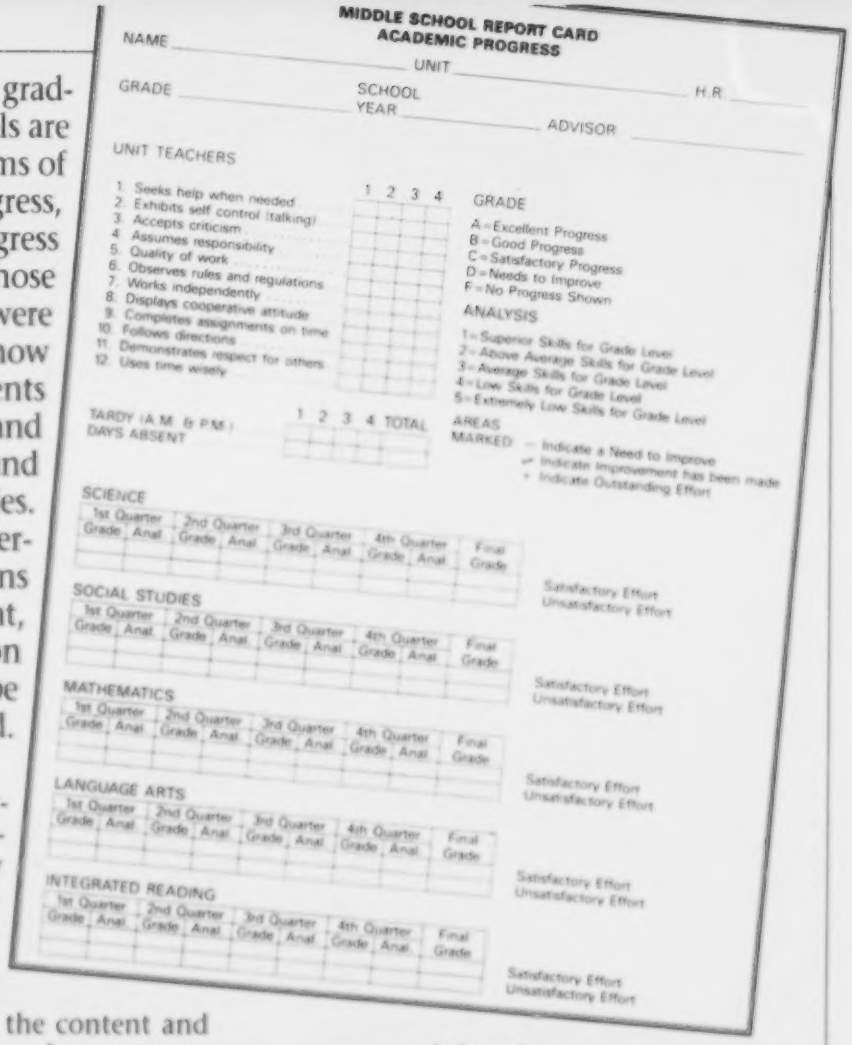
The citizenship of your child is as important to his total welfare as his academic training. It is important that the teachers and parents work together in close cooperation. We urge you to visit school and confer with principals and teachers. The above personality and character traits are for your added information. A check (✓) after any of the above items shows a need for improvement. No check indicates performance that is acceptable or better.

THIS REPORT IS FOR YOUR FILES. IT SHALL NOT BE RETURNED TO THE SCHOOL.

_____ PARENT OR GUARDIAN

PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN SCHOOL COPY TO _____ BY _____

**Figure 2**—This 5 1/2" by 8 1/2" high school report card illustrates some of the problems that can result when physical size is reduced. The space allotted for comments is probably not adequate given the number of areas of study that can be listed. Using only the male referent ("his") found in the lower right should be avoided.



MIDDLE SCHOOL REPORT CARD
ACADEMIC PROGRESS

NAME _____ UNIT _____

GRADE _____ SCHOOL _____ H.R. _____

YEAR _____ ADVISOR _____

UNIT TEACHERS

1. Seeks help when needed
2. Exhibits self control (talking)
3. Accepts criticism
4. Assumes responsibility
5. Quality of work
6. Observes rules and regulations
7. Works independently
8. Displays cooperative attitude
9. Completes assignments on time
10. Follows directions
11. Demonstrates respect for others
12. Uses time wisely

1 2 3 4

GRADE
A = Excellent Progress
B = Good Progress
C = Satisfactory Progress
D = Needs to Improve
F = No Progress Shown

ANALYSIS
1 = Superior Skills for Grade Level
2 = Above Average Skills for Grade Level
3 = Average Skills for Grade Level
4 = Low Skills for Grade Level
5 = Extremely Low Skills for Grade Level

TARDY (A.M. & P.M.)
DAYS ABSENT

1 2 3 4 TOTAL

AREAS MARKED — Indicate a Need to Improve
✓ Indicate Improvement has been made
+ Indicate Outstanding Effort

SCIENCE

| 1st Quarter Grade | 1st Quarter Anal | 2nd Quarter Grade | 2nd Quarter Anal | 3rd Quarter Grade | 3rd Quarter Anal | 4th Quarter Grade | 4th Quarter Anal | Final Grade |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | |

Satisfactory Effort
Unsatisfactory Effort

SOCIAL STUDIES

| 1st Quarter Grade | 1st Quarter Anal | 2nd Quarter Grade | 2nd Quarter Anal | 3rd Quarter Grade | 3rd Quarter Anal | 4th Quarter Grade | 4th Quarter Anal | Final Grade |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | |

Satisfactory Effort
Unsatisfactory Effort

MATHEMATICS

| 1st Quarter Grade | 1st Quarter Anal | 2nd Quarter Grade | 2nd Quarter Anal | 3rd Quarter Grade | 3rd Quarter Anal | 4th Quarter Grade | 4th Quarter Anal | Final Grade |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | |

Satisfactory Effort
Unsatisfactory Effort

LANGUAGE ARTS

| 1st Quarter Grade | 1st Quarter Anal | 2nd Quarter Grade | 2nd Quarter Anal | 3rd Quarter Grade | 3rd Quarter Anal | 4th Quarter Grade | 4th Quarter Anal | Final Grade |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | |

Satisfactory Effort
Unsatisfactory Effort

INTEGRATED READING

| 1st Quarter Grade | 1st Quarter Anal | 2nd Quarter Grade | 2nd Quarter Anal | 3rd Quarter Grade | 3rd Quarter Anal | 4th Quarter Grade | 4th Quarter Anal | Final Grade |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | |

Satisfactory Effort
Unsatisfactory Effort

**Figure 3**—The grading symbols are defined in terms of student progress, but progress according to whose standard? We were also unsure how well parents would understand the "Grade" and "Analysis" scales. If these are different dimensions of achievement, an explanation should be included.

content studied during the grading period. Rather, it simply indicates the student's average percent-correct score on the assessments used by a particular teacher, the content and difficulty of which are unknown to parents. This grading method remains popular with teachers, not because it communicates achievement so explicitly or thoroughly, but because it is convenient to use and portrays an air of precision. Thus, it should be made clear on the report card that the percent is based upon average percent-correct for all assessments that count towards the grade.

## How Should Conduct be Graded?

Which student characteristics should be assessed for inclusion in grades? Many teachers count conduct, effort, attitude, and attendance when compiling final grades.[3,4,5,6] According to these authors, most teachers weight these non-achievement traits to some extent, some quite heavily. What is the impact on communication?

Informing parents about student conduct or effort is probably desirable, but we recommend that those factors be assessed and reported separately from the academic performance in subject matter areas. After all, grades at the middle and high school levels are assigned for various subjects, and it should be reasonable to infer that the grade represents competence in a specific subject. Teachers and administration should discuss these issues to gain a common understanding of how mixing achievement and non-achievement information can compromise the interpretation of grades in academic subjects. If consensus cannot be reached, then it should be made clear on the report card that academic grades might contain a significant portion of non-achievement information depending upon an individual teacher's grading policy.

When level of effort is reported, it is essential that the term be clearly defined as in the following example from a Wisconsin report card:

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1=Completes far more work than is expected
2=Does somewhat more than is needed to achieve
3=Works just hard enough to meet class requirements
4=Could try harder to complete required work
5=Devotes far too little energy to completing class work

Unfortunately, on most of the report cards we reviewed, the terms like "conduct" and "effort" were left undefined, as though their meanings were common knowledge. Because these words can be interpreted in a variety of ways, it is important that the symbols used for reporting about them be as carefully defined as those used with grades.

## Should "S" and "U" and "+" and "-" Symbols Be Used?

Another issue is the number of points on the grading scale. All other factors being equal, more points are preferable to fewer. This allows for greater precision when reporting student performance. When only two symbols, such as S=Satisfactory and U=Unsatisfactory, are used, differences in levels of satisfactory performance cannot be described.

This might work well in elementary schools, where grades tend to be supplemented by a teacher's written comments, but by middle school, when such elaborations are less common, the number of symbols available should be large enough to adequately report on the wide variety of performance levels students usually demonstrate. The number of symbols available is an especially important consideration if grade inflation (overuse of high grades and underuse of low ones) is present.

Many schools use pluses and minuses effectively to overcome the problem of a shrinking grading scale. For example, when high "B" and low "B" performances of two students are distinguished with different grades (i.e. "B+" and "B-"), more accurate pictures of achievement can be conveyed.

It is a fact of life that students vary in the amount they learn and in the level of skill they develop for a variety of tasks. By communicating information about differential performance, both parents and student come to understand the student's areas of strength and weakness better, and, consequently, more constructive plans for improvement can be discussed. Most teachers, too, would like to send messages to students that are both accurate and motivating. That is, when both "A" and "A-" grades are available, the "A" student will be more satisfied to know that his/her outstanding performance is being distinguished from that of an "A-" student whose good work is not so exceptional. Likewise, low-achieving students might be motivated to improve if they realize the distance they can move is small (e.g. "D+" to "C-") rather than large (e.g. "D" to "C" or "F" to "P").

## What are Limitations of Computerized Cards?

Another important issue related to non-achievement traits has to do with the opportunities available to communicate with parents via comments—hand-written or computer-generated. At the elementary level, virtually all of the reports cards in our sample are filled-out by hand, and often hand-written, customized narratives are included about each child. However, our review showed that only about half of the middle school report cards are filled out by hand; the rest are computer-generated. Furthermore, computers are used almost exclusively for preparing and printing high school report cards. Using computers for this purpose is a bit of a trade-off. On the one hand, providing detailed information on items like absence/tardiness and present/cumulative grade-point averages

become relatively easy with computers. On the other, the customized, personalized comments teachers may want to make can only be replaced by generic comments available through the computer.

With computerized reporting, teachers can choose from banks or menus of comments to provide explanatory information about student performance—i.e., "Asks appropriate questions" or "Disturbs other students." Some of these menus contain over 100 statements from which teachers might select. Some researchers have investigated how teachers in one middle school used a list of 82 computerized comments and teacher/parent perceptions about this system.[7] Data from the first and second quarters were analyzed, and there was consistency across these marking periods.

Teachers could assign two comments per student, but only 52% of the students were assigned the maximum for the first quarter (51% for the second quarter). The findings indicated that, on average, teachers used 18 of the 82 comments but there was great variability among teachers. Teachers used comments to justify the grades they assigned; this was especially true in explaining low grades. However, even though teachers had access to almost three times more negative comments than positive ones, on average,

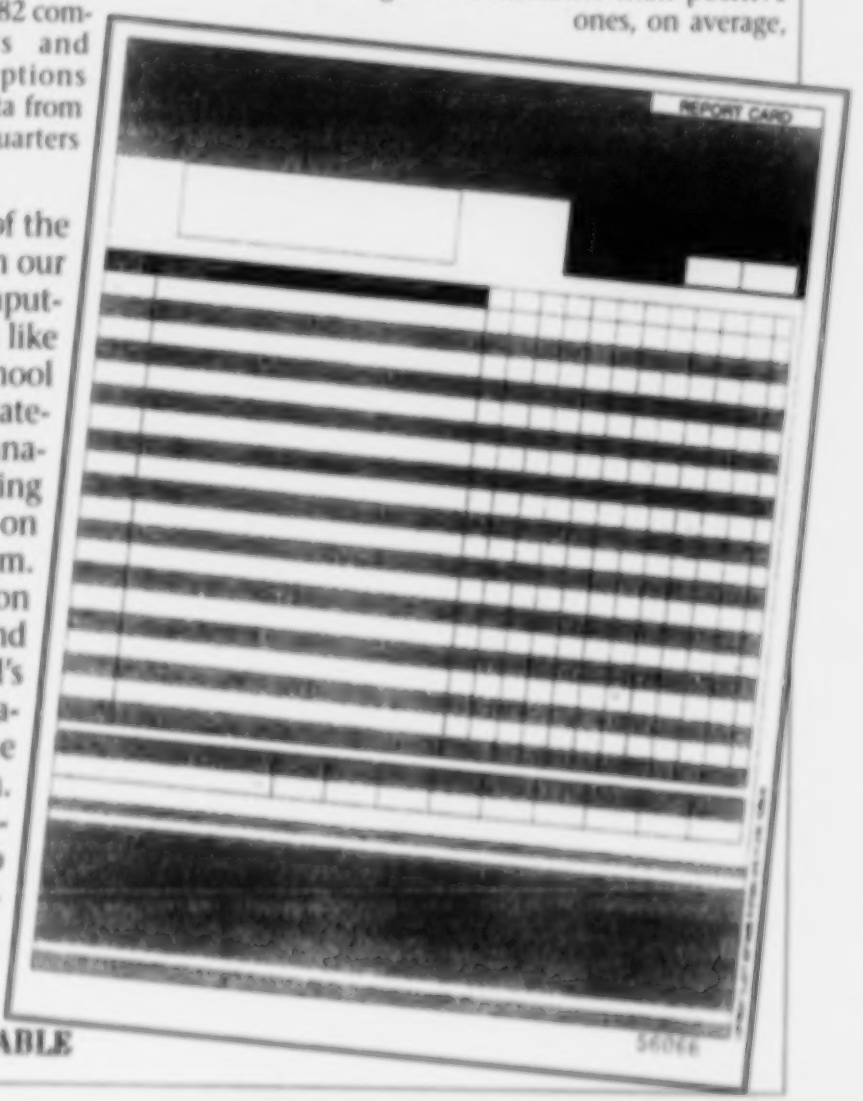


**Figure 4**—Many of the high schools in our sample used a computer-generated form like this one. One school had a mission statement and an explanation of the grading symbols printed on the back of the form. An identical mission statement was found on another school's report card—probably written by the vendor for both. Perhaps computerization invites too much standardization.

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they tended to assign positive comments to most of their students. Teachers appeared to like the system more than parents, but both groups indicated some level of dissatisfaction with the computerized comments. "Overall, it appears that teachers want to give (and parents frequently want to receive) more information than grades provide."[5]

## Does Card Size Make a Difference?

Somewhat related to the use of computerized comment menus is the issue of the physical size of the report card. At the elementary level, most of the report cards that we saw were printed on standard 8 1/2" by 11" paper. But at the middle and high school levels, they tended to be much smaller. The effect of the reduced dimensions is to limit the amount of information that can be shared with parents. It is common, for example, to see the number of computer-menu comments that might be chosen for each student to be restricted to only two per teacher. In addition, the limited size made it impossible for some schools to include definitions (or clear ones) for their achievement and non-achievement symbols. Larger report cards might also make it possible for districts to communicate their assessment philosophy which could aid in interpreting the marks assigned. It would provide another opportunity to share their educational vision with members of the community.

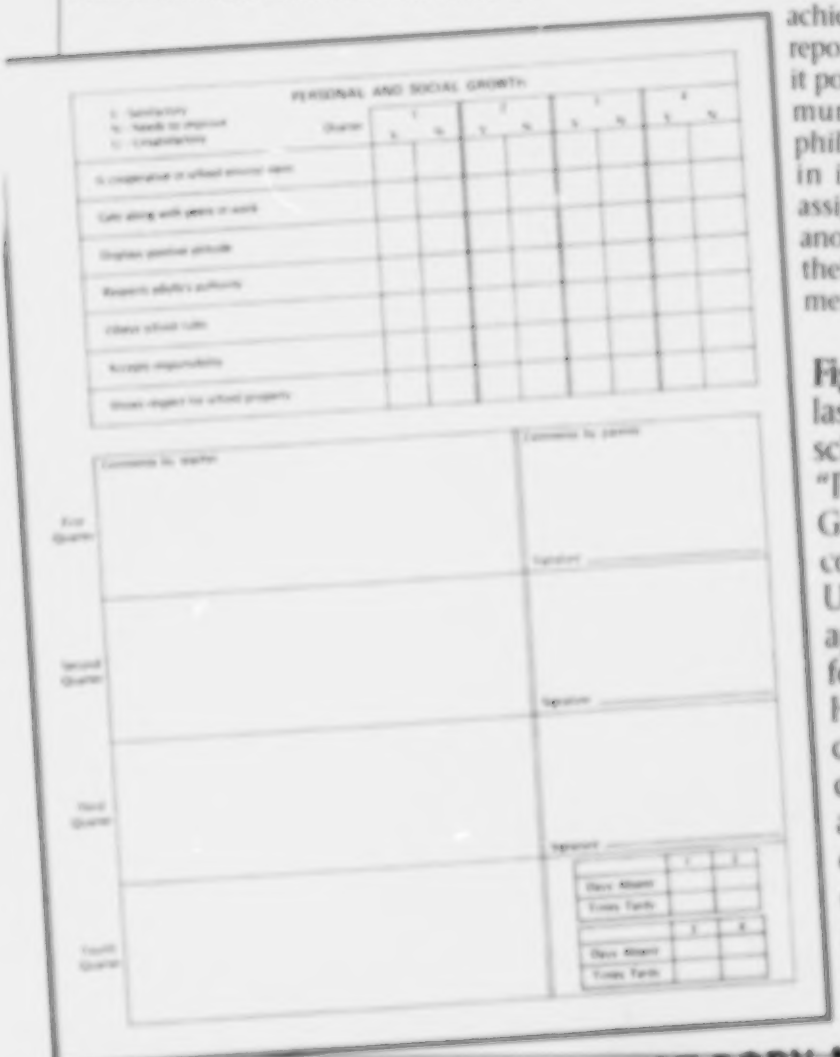


**Figure 5**—This is the last page of a middle school report card. In "Personal and Social Growth" section, a column for "U - Unsatisfactory" appears to be missing for each quarter. However, the report card invites two-way communication by allowing parents the opportunity to write comments—a fairly rare idea given our sample.





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## What Educators Can Do to Improve Report Cards.

The following steps can be taken to improve the report cards used at the middle and high school levels:

1. **Provide thorough definitions of all the symbols that can be used.** Do the symbols represent a comparison with others or an absolute reading of the level of performance?

2. **Strive for consensus among faculty about the legitimate components of an academic grade.** Agree on ways to share other, non-achievement information.

3. **Consider the number of symbols being used.** Do teachers have an adequate number of points on the scales they use to accurately portray the wide variety in student performance?

4. **Determine whether the method of sharing non-achievement is adequate.** Can computerized comment menus be better used? Should other approaches be considered?

5. **Consider limitations to communication imposed by physical size of the current report card.** Could additional space be used to enhance the interpretability of the grades?

6. **Because the communication in a report card is intended to be two-way, involve parents and students in the process of reviewing the effectiveness of the current reporting system.** What recommendations do parents have for making the report card a better messenger from the school?

Report cards that deserve an "A" are stellar communication links between the teachers in your schools, the students they teach, and the parents who have a strong desire to know about their child's school progress. ☞

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David A. Frisbie is professor of measurement and statistics at the University of Iowa.

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*If at first you do succeed, try something harder.*

*Ann Landers*

# The Administrative Portfolio:

## A means to document achievement and assess one's career.

By Curtis L. Guaglianone and Diane M. Yerkes

## Introduction

Portfolios, as an authentic assessment device, are becoming popular in schools across the nation. Primary school children through high school seniors are collecting and organizing the best examples of their work. In many school districts, teachers also are creating portfolios, most often for professional development or evaluation purposes. While portfolios are "messy to construct, cumbersome to store, difficult to score, and vulnerable to misrepresentation,"[1] the number of teachers who are creating their own documentation of teaching performance is growing. The purpose of this article is to provide a guide for administrators to assemble an Administrative Portfolio designed for one's professional development.

A prospective or current school executive can use the administrative portfolio to self-evaluate, monitor professional growth and development, document specific competencies, or prepare for a job interview. While the emphasis of the administrative portfolio is usually professional development, the artifacts collected and the reflections written can be used for a variety of purposes.

The primary purpose of the portfolio is to assist a person in developing a better knowledge and understanding of one's professional self. Reflection, hard work, and an accurate knowledge of one's competencies are key ingredients to the process of building a portfolio. Successful leaders have demonstrated that one common ingredient of transformational leadership is self knowledge. "No one can teach you how to become yourself, to take charge, to express yourself, except you."[2]

An administrative portfolio is a "collection of thoughtfully selected exhibits or artifacts and reflections indicative of an individual's experiences and ability to lead and of the individual's progress toward and/or the attainment of established goals or criteria."[3] The portfolio is an archive, an exhibit of a professional's qualities, experiences, accomplishments, and potential.[4] Also, a portfolio can be "a demonstration of one's public self as a representation of what one can do, what one knows, and what one has done, presented to a select audience."[5]

## Uses of a Portfolio

A portfolio may be used for professional growth, evaluation, and career advance-

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ment. One can distinguish between *folios* and *portfolios*.[6] *Folios* contain a collection of artifacts and reproductions that include budgets, professional development plans, videotaped events, journals, oral histories, and autobiographies that capture a person's performance.

*Portfolios* include artifacts and reproductions demonstrating particular skills, competencies, or pieces of knowledge.

The definitions are especially significant as administrators develop portfolios for their professional growth; the collection of artifacts is the first step. The second is to reflect on the materials and make personal judgments about professional strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, failures, aspirations, and goals.

Although a person would have one overall portfolio, with careful selection of contents and skillful display, one can tailor-make the contents to serve different purposes:

- **Professional Development** - The portfolio can be used for self-assessment, reflection, and analysis of behaviors relating to an administrator's performance. It should include a comprehensive collection of evidence from the administrator's professional life. One use of this portfolio could be part of a peer coaching or mentoring dialogue process among administrators.
- **Evaluation** - Superintendents, school boards, or other potential employers may use it to provide an external judgment of the effectiveness of the administrator's leadership. Judgment will be based on the artifacts and reflections included in the portfolio that provide evidence of attainment of established goals. If the document is to be used for evaluation purposes, items in the portfolio should be selected to show evidence of administrative competence.
- **Career Advancement** - Portfolios can provide a unique method for pursuing promotions or advancement and for a board's use in assessing applicants during the final selection process of potential district administrators. This document should contain artifacts and reflections representing accomplishments, experiences, and skills that are not evident in the usual application letter, resume, or interview.

Busy administrators rarely take time to reflect on their careers and the quality work they have accomplished. A retired superintendent,[7] now working with graduate students, commented that portfolios are a way to have a clear record of one's work and career. He wished someone had suggested, in his earlier years as a superintendent, keeping such records, as he has forgotten or has no record of his many presentations, community contributions, and work with students and teachers.

During a career, administrators may be asked for illustrative stories or examples from their work, accomplishments or honors in a particular area, or their own professional development or community activities. Demonstrating growth or change over time, documenting achievement, describing the evolution of projects, tracking professional development—the administrative portfolio includes these and other areas as part of this professional collection of work.

## Four Steps Necessary to Create a Portfolio.

### *1. Begin a Collection of Data.*

Begin by collecting work samples. They might include evaluations by superiors, letters written about school employees or volunteers, evidence of participation and/or leadership in professional development, documentation of the success of others as a result of the administrator's leadership, and community involvement experiences. The process should begin with current and recent materials and continue throughout

one's career.

**Materials needed include:**

- File folders and space in a file cabinet,
- A computer file to record, in an organized fashion, important events throughout one's career,
- An organizational system for collecting data, and
- Commitment to finding old and saving new artifacts to document all facets of one's professional career.

A common question is, "How do you know what's important?" The answer is "At first, collect everything!" Careful selection will be part of the reflection process. Most portfolio users have a file drawer or box of materials that were considered but not incorporated into the portfolio. If an item might be needed, keep it for consideration! Do not become too obsessive, however, about finding or keeping every scrap of paper.

## *2. Develop an Organizational System.*

An organizational system is necessary to begin collecting data. The organizational plan chosen will help determine how to label the folders and develop the computer file. Gather information and begin filing documents into the appropriate folders. In the file, keep records in specific categories, such as leadership, instruction, curriculum, grants, community leadership, publications, contributions to professional organizations, and so forth. Plan to add professional accomplishments on a regular basis, perhaps once a week. Some professionals add the latest presentation, committee chair position, or school success, at the top of a prepared list. Provided below is one organizational option.*

### Individual Development

Resume
Transcripts
Letters of Recommendation
Autobiography
Goals, long and short term
Educational platform/philosophy

### Competence and Experiences in Administration

Summaries/samples of standard education administration assessments,

evidence of experience in administrative tasks, committee leadership, study of a school problem, samples of letters or other written documents, evidence of participation in interviews or observations,

Letter from an administrator acknowledging particular work, evidence of substituting for an administrator, evidence of instructional leadership, evidence of board presentations, and evidence of conference presentations,

Journal articles written by the individual, grant applications, copy of final reports from university fieldwork experiences,

Any and all evidences that demonstrate professional action by the school administrator.

### Professional Development

Evidence of conference or staff development presentations,

Evidence of one's understanding of professional research, such as an abstract of a study,

Brief annotated bibliography on topics of interest,

Examples of professional growth, such as citations of classes, conferences or workshops, and study groups attended

Membership in professional organizations

### Service to Education and the Community

Description of voluntary actions, supported by letters or certificates of appreciation by agencies, administrators, parents, colleagues, or teachers,

Evidence of coaching or coordinating activities beyond paid assignments,

Documentation of participation on

committees or groups--school, service, business, religious, community

It is appropriate to ask for letters acknowledging one's service in any of the above activities; the letter of support then becomes an artifact to include in the portfolio.

Writers in this field agree that personal background items, (i.e. high school records, age, birthdate, picture, racial and ethnic origin, marital status, number of children, gender, newspaper clippings) should be left out of the portfolio. Dated and confidential material also are inappropriate.

### *3. Take Time to Reflect.*

The Professional Development Portfolio requires serious reflection about which items will best represent the administrator. Not only should the portfolio represent the administrator's best professional work, it should also represent one's personality. Select items that reflect personal values and beliefs.

A written summary for each of the four sections of the portfolio may be helpful. One person, for example, includes a section on networking, six samples of certificates from her work with universities and various educational agencies, and a short paragraph describing why this work was important to her personal development.

One approach to the "reflection" would include selecting a representative artifact, describing the who, what, when, where, and how, and then making an appraisal.[9] Does the portfolio represent the administrator's values; is it consistent with one's vision and mission; does it clearly meet the purpose of the portfolio, which is to demonstrate one's professional self?

### *4. Keep the Portfolio Current.*

One administrator says that second only to developing the portfolio is the challenge of maintaining it. Use the computer to continue to track activities. Collect records of current work for folder. Pay regular attention to recording career events, update the resume, and update letters of recommendation and current transcripts to ensure that the portfolio will contain the necessary data for professional development.

## Is All the Work Worth the Effort?

Reviewing the purpose of the portfolio as a tool for professional development, one must consider the individual benefits of such a document. Many educators developed their portfolios for one or more of these reasons:

- To demonstrate, with evidence, administrative skills and experience
- To have a method for reviewing, organizing, and assessing one's own work
- To develop an organized framework to reflect upon substance of practice
- To practice reflection-in-action to improve one's practice
- To create a "story" demonstrating one's educational leadership
- To set a precedent and model authentic assessment through a portfolio process for staff and students
- To be competitive in the job market

Those who have used portfolios as an on-going tool to improve their practice report that, even if the document is not seen by others, the process of creating the professional portfolio, and the reflection and focus on one's work and beliefs, was worth the effort.[10] A novice administrator notes that the opportunity to view her entire portfolio called her attention to areas in which she had limited experiences, and she set about to gain additional experience.[11] She also noted that some of her behaviors changed as a result of the portfolio, such as promptly sending appreciation letters to teachers and staff after she had to

hunt far and wide for documentation that reflected thousands of hours of her own committee work, presentations, and special projects.

Portfolio development does take time. The Professional Development Portfolio is a life-long learning practice that provides the safety of a private document to be used for objective reflection that leads to professional growth. When the portfolio framework is finished, most administrators are pleased to have had the opportunity to reflect on their careers.

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**They can be contacted at the School of Education, 5005 N. Maple, MS #303, Fresno, CA 93740. 209-278-0292.**

**This article has been adapted from one by the same authors that appeared in *Thrust for Educational Leadership*, published by the Association of California School Administrators.**

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*Continuous effort—*
*not intelligence or strength—*
*is the key to unlocking our*
*potential.*

*Liane Cordes*

# Book Reviews

by Albert E. Holliday, guest editor for this edition

**Books for review and requests to serve as guest book reviewer may be sent to editor Arthur W. Steller, Superintendent of Kingston City Schools, 61 Crown St., Kingston, NY 12401**

## Survival and Advancement

### How to Land the Best Jobs in School Administration

Georgia J. Kosmoski. 1999. Corwin Press. $24.95.

Which of these would make the most difference when you seek an administrative position?

1. Dressing well.
2. Having a "friend" inside the system.
3. Writing a comprehensive resume/cover letter.
4. Having a mentor.

Georgia is a professor at Governors State University near Chicago. She conducted research involving 600 interviews, mostly in suburban and urban districts, to learn what one should do to secure a desired position. She studied 50 prospective administrators who acquired a mentor to help in their search for a job, and 50 who did not have a mentor. Those who had mentors, she found, doubled their chances of being employed.

She gives advice on finding, recruiting and working with the person who could be the key to that perfect job.

Georgia provides detailed insights and tips about: cover letters and resumes, identifying one's strengths and weaknesses, selection committees, harassment factors, preparing for the interview, clothing, interview questions, and negotiating a contract.

Dr. Kosmoski notes that she is "the only female professor in the university's program that serves 350 educational administration graduate students, 61% of whom are women." She does not indicate that she worked with a mentor to obtain her current position, but I suspect she did.

### 97 Savvy Secrets for Protecting Self and School

Alice Healy Sesno. 1998. Corwin Press. $14.95

This is a work-in-progress, the author says, and is presented as a "first-aid" or survival kit for classroom teachers. Her secrets are one-page items of three to six paragraphs each on specific techniques, mostly to avoid negative outcomes. Some of the secret titles: Never leave your class alone, not even for a minute. Beware the power of the press, radio, TV and the Internet. Don't give special gifts, and don't accept them. Allow no strangers into the classroom. Don't initiate self-esteem or value-construct programs. Report all threats. Don't let stress creep up on you.

Savvy Secret #79: "Don't get on the defensive when people just want to be heard." The first paragraph of #79:

"What's the number one thing that gets teachers–and entire school staffs–into trouble? It's being on the defensive, being too thin-skinned to discuss anything without

feeling they're under attack... Teachers need to give parents a chance to talk...if they would only listen, there wouldn't be a battle...When a teacher is on the defensive, things go downhill in a hurry."

#31: "Dress appropriately.

"Even on casual Fridays, teachers must not allow their attire to create confusing images. 'Who's the adult here?' should never have to be asked.

"Studies...of teachers in casual attire and 'suit and tie' attire show that 'more formally' as being highest in importance and value."

Alice has been a New York City teacher, and administrator with the New York state education department, and a college faculty member. She warns that teachers and administrators face legal and procedural booby traps that can trip the unwary. She points out hidden dangers and provides cautionary notes to steer people away from career-killing episodes.

The text could serve as a useful lunch/break discussion manual for a school's staff as well as a personal reference guide.

## Educational Administration–A Decade of Reform

**Joseph Murphy and Patrick B. Forsyth, editors. 1999. Corwin Press. $24.95**

Murphy is professor of education at Vanderbilt University. Forsyth is CEO of the University Council for Educational Administration. The UCEA issued 35 recommendations in 1988 to improve the preparation of school administrators. In this collection of 12 articles, the editors and nine contributors report on progress in the field to reform the profession.

The 283-page text is a comprehensive report in more detail than space will allow in this report. It is fair to say that there appears to be no agreed-on national standards or approaches to guide university officials in this field, at least as yet.

One contributor, a university professor, says she "still believes in the mission we set out for ourselves. I believe that the direction in which we are headed [at her university] is better instructionally [than it was 10 years ago], prepares analytic administrators, helps them clarify their values and see their futures, and challenges them to develop their thinking...I like the outcomes [of reform] but doing the work to get the program there is not fun..."

Another contributor, and education professor, writes that "it is our responsibility to challenge the often uninformed belief systems of practitioners with powerful alternatives to traditional bureaucratic thought. ...we professors of educational leadership have [the task] of preparing outstanding leaders for our schools. This requires authenticity in our preservice and inservice programs of study and in our collegial relationships with practicing school leaders.

"Most of our current programs fall short of these goals. Many fail because [universities] are staffed with professors whose knowledge base does not prepare them to challenge conventional practice. Others fail because they have chosen to eschew their responsibility to serve their clientele in exchange for the more esoteric life of the scholar-professor. The time has passed when we can afford to tolerate either of these conditions."

The book may be of value to education professors who are considering teaching in a university setting.

This reviewer senses that progress in actions related to the 35 recommendations has been less than UCEA leaders had hoped. In any case, I would have preferred clear statements of what the 35 recommendations were, and what has been done or not done, at least generally, for each.

Locating specifics of improvement and progress in these pages is most difficult. I would have liked to see a listing of the most promising models of particular programs, and 10-15 matters or areas the UCEA leadership wants to emphasize or study in the next 10 years.

Perhaps someone could prepare an executive summary of this book to these ends. I suggest that such a summary would be most helpful to those who view the reform process as an important one.

## The K-8 Principal in 1998–A 10-Year Study

James L. Doud and Edward P. Keller. 1998. National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. (Doud is education department chair at University of Florida, and Keller is retired deputy CEO, NASEP.)

In the past 10 years, principals have observed "a dramatic increase in emphasis on alternatives to public school education. Charter schools, choice, home education and vouchers have compelled principals to increase their marketing and political efforts to ensure continuing financial and psychological support from the public." So noted Samuel Sava, CEO of NAESP in the foreword (and his last actions as CEO of the association).

Principals (1,323 in the national study) say their greatest need is help understanding and using technology in classroom instruction and administration. They also refer to rising pressure to increase student achievement in a population that contains youth from quite varying backgrounds.

The number of women who now lead elementary schools has increased 22% in the past 10 years. Now "we must improve our efforts to recruit and place minority people in leadership positions," Sava wrote.

In the book's 10 chapters, the authors have placed 62 helpful tables and charts. Most chapters are in a question-answer format. Readers should be able to locate areas of most interest to them easily. (The overall

**Assumptions *Hindering* Collaboration**

- Parents who don't attend school events don't care about their children's school success.
- Parents who are illiterate, non-English speaking or unemployed can't help their children.
- Parent activists take time away from the essential duties of the principal/teacher.
- Parents from different ethnic and racial groups don't understand how to help their children.
- It is up the parents to find out what is going on at school.
- Parent involvement is not worth the effort.

**Assumptions *Facilitating* Collaboration**

- Not all parents can come to feel comfortable when they do come to school; that doesn't mean they don't care.
- All families have strengths and skills they can contribute to their children's school success.
- Parent activists are important community leaders who can help the school improve.
- Parents from different ethnic and racial groups have alternative and important ways of supporting their children.
- Schools have a responsibility to reach out to parents.
- Parent involvement is an effort that pays off in improved student achievement, improved school effectiveness, and increased parent and community support for education.

Credit: Home and School Partners in Student Success Handbook, San Diego, CA, Schools, Chrispeels, Frenandez and Preston, 1991.

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format is one publishers of texts, especially ones dealing with complicated subjects, could emulate.)

A few highlights from the book:

•Suburban principals report 84% parent support, while rural principals report 63% support.

•Urban community members are more likely to become involved in school activities. Lower involvement occurs in small towns and rural areas.

•Ninety percent of principals are assigned to only one school.

•Median school enrollment is 425 (K-6). Median district enrollment is 4,400.

•Principals have decision-making authority over 26% of their school's budget.

•The "typical" principal has one school, is a 50-year old white male making $60,000. He has been in education for 25 years, a principal for 11 years and in the present position for six years. He works 10 hours a day (five days) and about eight additional hours during the week.

•Increasingly, principals are being held accountable for what takes place in the school. The need for principals who are effective leaders has never been greater.

Principals and prospective school leaders should find the text helpful and instructive about reality in today's schools and the demands a principal is likely to encounter in the next decade.

**Excerpt from *Goal Analysis*:**

Manager Charlie decided to be more productive. He set up a recorder in his office and whenever he changed or started an activity, he would say into the recorder "9:15, Mary came in to chat" or "10:30, left for meeting with the boss."

He soon learned that about 60% of his time was taken up by things that other people wanted him to do [including just listen]. Then, as soon a people learned he was keeping track of his time, they reduced their demands on his time. They would think twice, for example, before entering his office to pass the time of day as they knew this activity would lead to an entry such as "2:45, Bob came in to shoot the breeze." This was Charlie's first step in time control; next he would have to decide about specific activities that he would have to do to consider himself successful.«▽

## Goal Analysis–How to Clarify Your Goals So You Can Achieve Them

**Robert F. Mager. 1997. Center for Effective Performance, 4250 Perimeter Park South, Atlanta, GA 30341. 800-558-4237. $19.95**

Author Mager, a training and performance specialist, says people are fuzzy in thinking about goals. They often talk in vague terms and tend to generalize. What is needed, he writes, are goals that are specific and observable if one expects to gain desired performance.

In this text (a third edition), Mager uses charts, check lists, cartoons, diagrams, graphs and practice exercises to help a reader develop valid goal-analysis behavior, for self and with subordinates. [I use that term in the sense that a principal or department chair has authority of leadership in at least this area.]

From the text:

How many times have you heard someone say, "You can't define a good teacher."? Or, "Nobody can say what a good teacher is"?

These are pretty silly statements; the statements imply if you can't do some-

thing perfectly [a perfect description of a "good" teacher], you can't do it at all. But try it this way: Can you think of any things that a "good" teacher (whatever that means) *doesn't* do? Of course you can. And if you list things that are *unacceptable*, you have a beginning of an acceptable or desirable behavior description. How about these as examples of what good teachers *don't* do:

- Keep students in the dark about what is expected of them.
- Use language or examples that are inappropriate for their students.
- Punish students for doing the very things they are expected to do.

How about adding a few yourself...make a long list of your own–turn the statements from don'ts to dos, and you've gone a long way toward describing what many may have thought was not possible [that is, one can describe behaviors/attributes of good teachers].

The text can best be used as a work book, for an individual seeking achievement of goals, or with a small group of staff members. Mager does not use jargon, he gives many anecdotes and examples, and most of his content can relate to one's friends and family as well as to job-related situations. I recommend the book highly.

## Communication Skills

# Teacher's Manual for Parent and Community Involvement

**Larry E. Decker, Gloria A. Gregg and Virginia A. Decker. 1996. FAU Foundation, Community Education, Room 260, College of Education, 777 Glades Rd., Boca Raton, FL 33431. 407-367-3563. $17.95. Discounts for multiple copies.**

The *Teachers' Manual* is a collection of resource materials, reports and outlines of reasons why teachers should develop close relations with parents and how they can develop them.

Chapter headings include why parent/community involvement?, trends influencing public education, changing attitudes of parents (from leave "education" to the professionals to "how can we as parents become involved?"), what researchers tell us about parent involvement, principles and techniques for successful programs, and using volunteers in the classroom.

The authors have stated an obvious optimistic tone in titling this a *Teacher's Manual*. The fact is that, according to research we have seen, too many teachers do not believe it is their job to seek out parents and find ways to help them help their children.

For example, the text includes the following, labeled *Teacher Norms and Beliefs that Affect Parent Involvement Efforts*.

Of course, one can point out that teachers' scope of work ought to be specified in their employment contracts. If a board believes that parent involvement is necessary and is a priority, expectations accordingly should be clearly stated. Written policies should be followed by support and leadership by teachers' superiors who also have the task of counseling and evaluating teacher behavior in this area. It seems to this reviewer that in places where parent involvement is minimal, school boards and school CEOs are not themselves convinced that parent and community involvement can make a significant difference in student achievement. Or, they are unwilling to confront teachers and find ways to require and achieve education-parent collaboration.

One typical negative reference by education to such involvement is that people work while school is in session. But here are 20 activities to help at school that people can do at other times:

1. Participate in weekend work parties to beautify the school yard, build playground structures, plant shrubs or trees, paint murals, etc.
2. Assist at Saturday field trips.

3. Serve as resource volunteer explaining various kinds of jobs (police officer, firefighter, baker, truck driver, etc.) or other areas of specialized knowledge.
4. Help with fund-raising projects: car washes, bake sales, bazaars, carnivals, barbecues, flea markets, garage sales, etc.
5. Play with youngsters in the schoolyard during your lunch hour.
6. Make educational games at home: game boards, drill cards, and other learning materials.
7. Collect materials of any type for art projects: wallpaper, scrap paper, wood, old crayons, cloth, etc.
8. Post a school volunteer recruitment poster in shop or business.
9. Take pupils on a one-time tour of your shop or business during school hours or on the weekend.
10. Write down ideas for art projects or enrichment programs and share them with a school supervisor.
11. Help with a potluck dinner.
12. Type newsletters, general school notes, proposals, classroom assessment projects, etc.
13. Repair toys and classroom materials.
14. Sew costumes or puppets for plays, pillows for rest time, etc.
15. Do woodwork at home. Build room dividers, learning centers, or electric boards out of scrap wood and cardboard.
16. Ask friends, relatives, or other community members to volunteer.
17. Tutor a child in an after-school/night-time tutorial center.
18. Make attendance calls.
19. Offer to occasionally take care of children, so parents can participate in a special school project or event.
20. Ask how you can help after school or on weekends.

**Credit: School/Community Partnership Program, Little Rock, Arkansas, Schools.**

School is "out"–learning is "in," the authors of the text suggest. The American education system is still too teacher-bound and place-bound. But this text gives ample justification, and ideas, for a system that relates to the essential role of home and school–parent and teacher as educational allies.

## Building Parent-Teacher Communication–An Educator's Guide

**Cindy J. Christopher. 1996. Technomic Publishing, 851 New Holland Ave., Lancaster, PA 17604. 800-233-9936. $22.50. Multiple copies are as low as $16.50 each.**

Cindy, a third-grade teacher in New Jersey, believes that "education means *one-third* each of teacher, parent and student, when all three work together, the result is a successful child."

She presents an extremely detailed handbook for teachers to use in working closely with parents. Her sidebars, sample memos and letters, checklists, forms, question-answer sections and specific suggestions will be most helpful to a teacher who believes in the *one-third* approach (as opposed to teachers who consider only what happens in the classroom is what matters). This is her second book; her first is *Nuts and Bolts: A Survival Guide for Teachers*. She also conducts workshops on classroom management and parent communication.

**Excerpts:**

When I taught nursery school, the number one complaint parents had about their other children's school was their lack of knowledge as to what was happening in their child's classrooms (first grade and up). When they would ask their child about what was happening in school, the usual response was "nothing." When I accepted a position to teach third grade, I vowed that none of "my" parents would ever be able to say that they weren't informed.

I work hard to keep them abreast of happenings. I find that when they are kept informed, they become your biggest sup-

**Christopher's Building Communication Book.**

These are sample interim reports for teachers' use. Note that both have ample space for positive and negative comments. (A teacher should be prohibited from ever sending, as the first written communication to parents, a negative report. The first such contact should be positive, so the teacher can establish a rapport with the parent.) The book contains many other forms.

The publisher allows purchasers to photocopy various materials for minor base fees that are specified in the text.

potters and are very vocal.

I am alarmed at the number of teachers who state that they are too busy keeping up with day-to-day demands or they do not see a need to keep parents informed. **Some teachers believe they are paid to "teach" children, not to work with parents.** I wonder what would happen to our educational system if every teacher informed parents about what was going on in classrooms and school.

Mary K. M., a primary teacher, states she rarely does anything for herself that a parent could do for her (and her students) just as well. This frees her from busy work associated with teaching. She involves working parents by sending home things that need attention, such as putting poems on chart paper. She says a lawyer parent told her the most fun he had one day was cutting out shapes (from printed paper the teacher had sent home) that would be used later in a classroom math project.

Chapter 6 is devoted to her answers to questions most frequently raised by teachers. How do I deal with an angry, irate parent? I ask for parents to volunteer in the classroom, but no one offers. What can I do? How do I stop complaints concerning grading?

To the question, "What can I do about a parent who constantly complains about everything?" she replies:

> "Unfortunately, in some cases you will encounter parents who will not appreciate anything you do. You will find that no matter what you do, it will never meet their expectations. Ask previous teachers how they worked with these parents. Your best bet is to cope the best you can. Remember to document all communication (for example, a spoken conversation–keep a record.) Keep in mind that some people are just chronic complainers.

Overall, the text is excellent. It could be supplied to elementary teachers, especially new ones, who have expressed a need to strengthen parent/home ties. Officials could consider using this text if their system's board initiated a financial incentive-for-increased-achievement program. And, dare I make this suggestion, this text, used in a practical-experience inservice program, would be valuable for prospective teachers in the final stages of their university education.

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# Photo Credits

## Addresses for photographers whose work we are using in Vol. 20, No. 1

**Robert Finken** is a freelance photographer based in Richmond, Virginia (11016 Ashburn Rd., 23235). Call him at 804-320-1489 for special assignments.

**Dale D. Gehman** lives and works from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, (1540 Zarker Rd., 17601-5051). His phone number is 717-396-8972.

They can supply a variety of photos for review and publication on a one-time basis for fees to be arranged depending on the nature of the use.

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# Guidelines for Sub

## *Relations*—The Journal of Educational Relations

A refereed journal—scholarly articles by academic/higher education authorities are refereed by an international editorial review board. The *Journal* also accepts articles by practitioners and administrators in basic (K-12) education and journalists at large.

### Scope

Articles are sought on topics such as internal communication and climate, employee motivation, parent involvement, partnerships, working with the news media, community participation, audits, surveying and polls, community service programs for students, communication training, advisory committees, volunteers, writing and speaking, publications, alumni associations, foundations, mentoring, photography, and related topics.

The overall goal of the *Journal* is to support efforts to enhance/foster student achievement and staff productivity, and to provide information to build public knowledge of the value and potential benefits of a sound basic education of our youth. We advocate the concept that the school public relations function must be based on fact and reality as compared to ideals and goals of educators and the community at large.

### Style

Scholarly articles can be prepared following style guidelines of the publication manual of the American Psychological Association, **with these exceptions**:

1. **Do not** place last names of authors being cited and the year *within* the text. Number citations sequentially in the text; provide usual citations in **references following the article**.

2. Before the start of the article, include a summary of the scope and major findings of the article in one paragraph.

We encourage you to include photographs, drawings, and tables as appropriate.

### Submissions

- Submit four copies of a manuscript with a letter from the author(s).
- Articles should be 1,000 to 3,500 words in length.
- If produced on a computer, supply a disk, clearly labeled, in ASCII format, IBM format only, with the text copies.
- Include an abstract of the article and a two-three sentence credit for each author on a separate sheet.
- Advise if the article has been published or is being considered elsewhere.
- Queries for articles on specific topics are welcomed.
- SASE. Include a #10 self-addressed, stamped envelope for acknowledgement of receipt of your article. Include a 9" x 12" similar envelope for reply to submissions or queries.
- Response to an article or a query is usually conveyed to an author within 60 days.

**Address manuscripts and correspondence to Albert E. Holliday, Editor and Publisher, *Journal of Educational Relations*, 1830 Walnut St., Camp Hill, PA 17011. 717-761-6620.**

Previous *Journals* are available in microfilm from University Microfilm Int., 300 Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Refer to *Journal of Educational Communications* (1975-83), *Journal of*



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P.O. Box 657
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# A Do-It-Yourself 50-Year Report Card

**In 1950, the American Association of School Administrators published guidelines for School Public Relations. How does your school system measure up for the year 2000?**

| The Goals, 1950 | The Results, 2000 |
|---|---|
| "There is a public relations job for every employee of the system to do, a job that is part of everyday work..." | ❍ Yes ❍ No<br>Each staff member, on every level, has specific communication tasks and these are evaluated annually. |
| Unfortunately, CEOs and educators are unaware of what people in the community think of them until an explosive incident reveals the depth of their feelings..." | ❍ Yes ❍ No<br>The staff conducts a variety of community surveys each year and seeks citizenry feedback in formal and informal settings. |
| If people do not know what is being accomplished in schools, their support may fail..." | ❍ Yes ❍ No<br>Your school system publishes regular community newsletters, issues news releases to the media, and seeks other opportunities for people to be informed. |
| "Sound School PR must be honed, continuous, positive, comprehensive and sensitive to the people concerned..." | ❍ Yes ❍ No<br>The school board has adopted a School PR policy, and has authorized funds for a year-round communication, staffed by a trained professional. |



Source of "The Goals, 1950" is AASA. Source of "The Results, 2000" is the editor/publisher, Journal of Educational Relations, 1999.

# The Journal of Educational RELATIONS

Rowan University Guest Editor

Our 25th Year

PS 028192

43

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Promoting student achievement through positive school home community relationships Vol. 20 No. 2, 2nd Quarter 1999

## This Is the First Guest Editor Edition

In1998, I mentioned the availability of the *Journal* as a possible editorial/student project to a number of professors of communication. Several have decided to prepare guest-copy editions, and this is the first.

Most of the material in this edition is the work of communication students at Rowan University at Glassboro. Professor of communication Don Bagin assigned Jacob Farbman, his graduate assistant, as editor and coordinator of the Rowan students project. Jacob proved to be an excellent managing editor.

My intention was to offer the *Journal* as a practical opportunity for professors to form an editorial team to write about matters of their priority interests. Don chose to make this a graduate student project. At least two other professors are working on guest editions of a differing nature, and these will appear in the near future.

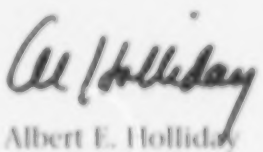
The offer remains open to higher education or other institution officials who would like to arrange for coverage of educational communication and related topics through pages of the *Journal*. I have written guidelines specifically for guest **editors** (in addition to our regular guidelines for **writers**) and I will send a copy of these on request.

## Frequency of Journal Changes in the Year 2000

This is our 25th year of production of this *Journal*. We issued the publication every other month for 1975-76, and since then have produced it as a quarterly. We had a few quite lean years and some publication delays along the way, which explains why we are in Volume 20 rather than 25.

Starting in 2000, we will publish two regular issues–to cover January-June and July-August–and supplemental and monograph sections in these issues as may be the case each year. We anticipate that the two regular issues will contain additional pages of copy. (We will inform subscribers, as well as magazine agency operators, who are to renew subscriptions running into the year 2000 that Volume 21 and future volumes will have *two*, rather than *four*, numbers or issues each year, with Supplemental sections.)

We do appreciate the support and interest of our subscribers and readers since 1975. I am assembling a list of the 500 or so contributors over the years. In addition, I am reviewing the 80 past editions to select the 25 "best" to run in our anniversary issue at the end of 1999 or the start of 2000. Feel free to nominate a few of your favorite articles.



Albert E. Holliday
Editor-Publisher

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2nd Quarter 1999

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Cover photo:
Robert Finken
(10532 Ashburn Road)
Richmond, VA 23235

**Subscription Service:**
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Outside U.S. (717) 766-0574
EDITORIAL CALL: (717) 761-6620

RELATIONS-The Journal of Educational Relations—ISSN 0741-3653
Editor-in-chief: Albert E. Holliday • Associate Editor: Joan M. Holliday
Book reviews: Arthur W. Sadler

The Journal of Educational Relations is published quarterly by the Educational Communication Center, Box 657, Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657. Telephone 717-761-6620.
Copyright 1999.
Subscriptions: Individual rate, $48 per year. Single copy, $15.
Library rate, $60 per year. Single copy, $20.
Add $4 for subscriptions outside of the United States.
Payment in U.S. funds.

Periodicals postage paid at Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Journal of Educational Relations*, P.O. Box 657, Camp Hill PA 17001-0657.

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**Guest editor Jacob Farbman (right) and Rowan University Graduate PR Program Coordinator Dr. Don Bagin.**

Photo by Carol Ann DeSimine

# Notes from the Guest Editor

By Jacob C. Farbman

I have to admit that editing this edition of *The Journal of Educational Relations* was no easy task. As a matter of fact, this was the most challenging assignment I have ever taken so far in my public relations career.

When I first accepted this assignment from Don Bagin, I thought that putting this journal together would be a piece of cake. I thought the copy submitted would be perfect. I expected the deadlines I gave people to be met without challenges. Also, I thought that writing for this publication would be of great interest to everyone I approached.

Well, what really happened was completely opposite from what I expected. Many of the articles were submitted ahead of schedule. Students were very understanding with the editorial changes that were made to their first drafts. A few of the articles were last-minute ideas, and students worked diligently to meet a tight deadline.

It seems as though I had to work on all of the articles to make them more enticing to be published and read. I learned that the publishing business demands making some sacrifices to meet deadlines. I also learned that no matter how good an article may first appear to be, there will always be something that has to be changed.

Throughout the process, I developed friendships that will last the rest of my life. I do want to thank everyone who contributed to this issue.

I'd also like to thank the *journal* publisher for giving us this opportunity and his guidance to me in the first stages of preparation of this issue saved me countless hours of doubt and editing frustration.

Most important, I thank Dr. Bagin for his support and wisdom during this project. He has helped thousands of students achieve their goals. Editing a national publication was one of my ambitions, and I could not have done this without his help.

ROWAN UNIVERSITY

# Consider the Roles of Communication Related to *School Violence/Crises*

• Planning • Coordination of Agencies • Spokespeople Network • Prevention • Post Trauma

By Michelle Kirsche

Thinking about the unthinkable can make the difference between a crisis escalating out of control or becoming controlled and contained. Officials of every school in every district across the nation should have a plan of action should an emergency situation occur. If time is wasted on determining a plan during a crisis, it would be precious time the problem is not being addressed.

Just as teachers need lesson plans, school administrators today must develop a crisis management plan for use in the event of an emergency. Tragic events in places like Denver and Oregon where students killed other students are unthinkable horrors. Struck with a similar situation and facing it unprepared can be calamitous.

**•Plan ahead**

"First you need to lay the groundwork, a firm foundation for a crisis," says **Marjorie Creswell Walsleben**, of the National School Safety Center in Westlake Village, California. Dr. Walsleben recommends schools follow five basic steps: assess local strengths and needs; form community partnerships; conduct site safety assessments; screen/monitor new employees and existing staff and students; and evaluate and update plans and programs.

"Shared information and cooperation are important," says Walsleben. "This is the rationale for forming community partnerships. We see it as a first step for every school."

Walsleben's formula for handling a potential emergency situation includes planning for prevention, control and recovery.

In the video "Thinking About the Unthinkable: Seeking Solutions to School Violence," **Connie Blaney**, director of public relations for the Norman, Oklahoma, school district, says the entire community must be involved from the outset. This includes police and fire officials, local hospitals, clergy, school administrators, psychologists and counselors. Parents, as well as students, are essential contributors to the mix.

A Checklist from *Thinking the Unthinkable: Seeking Solutions to School Violence*, available from NSPRA.

## Checklist

### 1. Do We Have a Crisis Plan?

•Does the school/district already have a crisis plan? Is it up-to-date with current names and telephone numbers?

•Was the plan developed in cooperation with police, fire and rescue, psychologists, hospital, parents and clergy?

•Do other agencies have copies of the plan?

•Are all personnel aware of the plan?

•Does the plan include a crisis intervention team? Are the members aware of their responsibilities?

•Has the plan had input from parents and other community members?

•Has a mock crisis exercise been considered to see how the plan works?

### 2. Is There Good Communication Network in Place?

•Do all school staff have two-way contact with the school office?

•Do schools have sufficient phone lines to call for emergency notification?

•Do secretaries have emergency numbers posted by the phone?

•Is the chain of command in a crisis situation clearly stated?

### 3. Has Each Building's Safety and Security Been Assessed?

•Have police, fire and school district personnel evaluated each building and recommended safety strategies?

•Have staff, parents and community members been involved in determining appropriate safety and security strategies?

### 4. Have Adequate Discipline and Prevention/Intervention Strategies Been Established?

### •Specify who is to do what

"Part of a crisis plan should include some very specified roles for people," says Karen Kleinz, associate director of NSPRA. "Everyone in the district needs to know 'this is my area of responsibility' so they know where to go and what to do. Everyone has a job to do in the event a *code red* is called. That way people are busy and occupied, take action, and are not left wondering what to do.

"For example, if something happens on a school campus, the principal's primary job is to look out for the safety of the students and staff. The principal doesn't have time to talk to TV and newspaper reporters. Someone else on the staff should have the responsibility of dealing with the media, someone should go to the hospital and someone should have the responsibility of moving students from point A to B."

Kleinz advises school officials to review the plan at the beginning of the year with teachers and staff, making necessary assignments, and provide every individual with a copy of the plan to keep in an easily accessible place. School districts can also stage a mock crisis exercise to see how the plan works in action.

### •Identify lines of communication

In the event of a real-life crisis situation, **Jim Cummings**, director of public relations for a Phoenix, Arizona, school district, notes school officials need to open the lines of communication from the very beginning. Cummings will first get word out to department heads. Then the department heads are instructed to notify teachers, who in turn will notify students of the situation.

Keeping reporters informed is



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**The Crisis Reaction: "Healing Hearts and Mending Minds," a curriculum for young crime victims designed by the National Organization for Victims Assistance, is as follows:**

Physical response to trauma is based on animal instincts, including:

1. Physical shock, disorientation and numbness: "Frozen fright"
2. "Fright-or-flight" or "adapt" reaction
   - •Adrenaline begins to pump through the body
   - •Body may relieve itself of excess materials, like ingested food
   - •One or more physical senses may become more acute while others shut down
   - •Heart rate increases
   - •Hyperventilation, sweating, etc. occurs
3. Exhaustion: physical arousal associated with flight-or-fight cannot be prolonged indefinitely; eventually it will result in exhaustion.

Emotional reactions include:

1. Stage one: shock, disbelief, denial
2. Stage two: cataclysm of emotions: anger/rage, fear/terror, sorrow/grief, confusion/frustration, self-blame/guilt
3. Stage three: reconstruction of equilibrium: emotional roller-coaster that eventually becomes balanced.

Source: The National Organization for Victims' Assistance Web site: www.nationalvictimsorg

another essential element in crisis communication. "One of our fundamental ground rules: students are not to be interviewed during the crisis," notes Cummings. "We will give reporters information. We will even bring out people who possibly may have had something to do with the incident. But we will have already kicked into the system's crisis mode with counselors working with students, as well as psychologists and social workers. Those people's work is too important to be disturbed by the reporters."

**Patricia Dean**, a broadcast programmer with Northwestern University, notes the media will go on air whether school officials want them to or not. If lines of communication are broken or nonexistent, there is the chance reporters will report incidents inaccurately, says Dean.

"One reaction you hear a lot is 'shut the door'," she notes. "If you shut the school doors and shut the media out, reporters will still go on the air. The reporters are going to be standing outside the doors and are going to be giving reports. They're going to be saying they're not allowed in and they don't know what's going on inside. The appearance will be that it's secretive or chaotic."

Dean says school officials are shutting out parents if they shut out the media. She recommends opening the doors in a controlled manner and working with the media. "If you take the initiative as an organization to set up a plan, you'll get more cooperation from reporters. You need to appoint one person as the media contact who is right out there, who says to reporters 'I want to help you. I know you have a job. We have a job.'

"Take the high road. Reporters will be at the school, the police department and at the hospital. You need to set up a plan to coordinate with those two other areas."

Another important factor in handling the media is delineating who will talk about what. In most violent cases the police become involved. School officials need to establish a healthy rapport with local police and fire personnel. When a crisis hits, police should handle police issues and school officials should talk about school issues. Make sure certain information isn't released

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until families are involved. Designate a location to hold a news conference should the event attract national media attention.

**•What about the aftermath?**

School officials must also think about the aftermath of a violent or tragic situation. The National Organization for Victims Assistance (NOVA), on the scene in the Springfield incident, sends federal crisis teams out in emergency situations.

**Kristine Siecker**, a psychologist with NOVA, notes an important first process is identifying the children, teachers and families affected and at what levels. "Begin making a list," says Siecker. "Track initial debriefing. Who needs follow up? Can it be done in school or does it need to be handled off site?"

According to Siecker, the debriefing process is most crucial in the 72 hours following an incident. "Normalizing" students is a very important step, notes Siecker. This means telling them that the different ways their body and mind are acting are very normal under very abnormal situations.

The healing process doesn't happen overnight, says Connie Blaney. "Healing takes a long time. There will always be the commemorative day. Many times the first anniversary is the most crucial. It is very important to have remembrance of the situation," she notes.

**•Consider the prevention factor**

Educators who experienced a violent or tragic event in their district may ask themselves, "Why didn't I see it coming?" But many educators **can** prevent potentially volatile situations from occurring in their district. Early warning signs exist in most cases of violence and those can be used to shape intervention practices, according to *Early Warning, Timely Response*. This guide to safe schools is a collaborative effort put forth by the National Association of School Psychologists and the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, along with the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice, and is available on the Internet.

One prevention tool used in a Phoenix district has cut the number of expulsions and prevented violent acts. The district established a telephone hotline for anonymous tips, an inexpensive but highly effective measure. Students, parents and teachers can leave a witness tip on the silent hotline that will be investigated by school or police officials. The anonymity allows students to deflect a potentially dangerous situation without ratting on a friend.

Teachers can also take a different approach in the classroom. **Tim Callahan**, director of public relations with the Professional Association of Georgia Educators, says teachers need to know if students in their classroom have committed a crime or are involved in the judicial system.

Callahan cites an incident in a Georgia school when a student had become violent in class and was suspended. That same student later came to school and, without a word, stood in a classroom doorway and shot and killed his teacher with a handgun.

"Teachers can take a different approach with students pre-disposed to violence such as bringing in counselors or other intervention. The knife or gun is only the outward manifestation of what is going on internally with a young person or his or her family," says Callahan.

***Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*** **provides early warning signs to look for. They include:**

1. Social withdrawal
2. Excessive feeling of isolation and being alone
3. Excessive feelings of rejection
4. Being a victim of violence
5. Feelings of being picked on and persecuted
6. Low school interest and poor academic performance
7. Expression of violence in writings and drawings
8. Uncontrolled anger
9. Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating and bullying behaviors
10. History of discipline problems
11. Past history of violent and aggressive behavior
12. Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes
13. Drug and alcohol use
14. Affiliation with gangs
15. Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms
16. Serious threats of violence

"An early warning sign is not a predictor that a child or youth will commit a violent act toward self or others. Effective schools recognize the potential in every child to overcome difficult experiences and to control negative emotions. Adults in these school communities use their knowledge of early warning signs to address problems before they escalate into violence."

*Early Warning, Timely Response* offers guides for educators, parents and even fellow students to help recognize warning signs. "In some situations and for some youth, different combinations of events, behaviors, and emotions may lead to aggressive rage or violent behavior toward self or others," reads the guide. "A good rule of thumb is to assume that these warning signs, especially when they are presented in combination, indicate a need for further analysis to determine an appropriate intervention."

There are many ways to prevent violent events from occurring on school campuses. NOVA recommends peer mediation, violence prevention curriculum, setting clear expectations in the classroom, peer mentoring and counseling services.

However, in the event of a potentially violent situation on a school campus, there are also workshops, such as those provided by the Crisis Prevention Institute in Brookfield, WI, that train educators to learn verbal and nonverbal reactions that can calm a situation before it gets out of hand.

## References


*Thinking About the Unthinkable: Seeking Solutions to School Violence*, a video produced by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), 15948 Deerwood Road, Rockville, MD 20855. Available for $139.95, shipping included.

Telephone conversation with Karen Klein, associate director of NSPRA, 301 519-0496.

Telephone conversation with Marjorie Hoblitzelle, editor of publications with the National School Safety Center in Westlake Village, Calif., 805 373-9977.

The National Association of School Psychologists' Web site, www.naspweb.org.

The National Organization for Victims' Assistance Web site, www.nonetility-nova.org.

The Crisis Intervention Institute Web site, www.crisisprevention.com.



**Michelle Kircher is a graduate student in public relations at Rowan University, where she works as a graduate assistant in the University Relations office. Prior to attending Rowan, she covered school board issues as a newspaper reporter.**

*If ignorance is bliss, there should be lots of happy people.*

Victor Cousins

# Ten Top Tips to Make PR Effective

By Alice Hogan

School public relations is a function essential to the success of education. Public relations staff members convey information and involve people with the goal of facilitating education to work at its best – successfully educating students.

Which programs work best? Which concepts should be in place? What is the best plan? A survey of some of the most experienced professionals in the school public relations arena resulted in these 10 top tips or best ideas for success in educational relations.

## Train employees

***Jeanie Flatt***, president of her own consulting firm and former director of communications for the Mesa School District in Mesa, Arizona, advises, "Train every employee in communication.

"Every employee, from bus driver to teacher to nurse to secretary to janitor, holds a responsibility as a communicator and an ambassador for the school district," she says. "Hold an in-service program to train existing staff and an orientation for new employees. Train employees in their communication job responsibilities.

"Bus drivers do more than just haul kids," Flatt said. "They are a 'driving billboard' created from their interaction with parents, kids and other drivers on the road. [They are 'the' school system to many people.

"School secretaries do more than just protect the principal and shuffle papers," she adds. "From how they answer the phone, to how they put someone on hold, to how they treat vendors, they are communicators. What they and other employees do and say creates the real image for the school district." (See "Training" sidebar.)

## Listen, listen

***JoAnn Hudson***, public information officer for Christina School District, Delaware, advises that the most important thing a public relations person can do is listen. "Listen to the people in your organization and learn what they say about themselves and what they do and hope to do. Listen, too, to the people outside the schools and what they say. Then, try to find ways to bring the two together through the system's communication program.

# "Training" employees is a two-step process

1. The superintendent, principals and supervisors have obligations they must attend to first. They should:

- Keep all staff members fully informed. They must be the first to know important information, especially that which concerns their own jobs. Note that all staff refers to certified and supporting employees as well as regular volunteers, substitute teachers, mentors and others who are often in schools.
- Ask for their opinions and ideas and follow through.
- Recognize their achievements, large and small, with a thank you, a handshake, a certificate or whatever is appropriate.
- Involve them in discussing possible or pending changes in school operations and procedures.
- Ask the School Board to establish a Safe Office or Ombudsperson where an employee can register a complaint or concern without fear of personal retribution.
- Inform new employees about expected procedures they should follow when they meet or greet or work with other people in or out of school. Do not assume any new employee will "know" what to do in this area.
- Help an employee resolve a job-related problem – small or large – at the job site promptly and fairly.
- Treat each employee as a Very Important Person, not as *just a teacher* or not as *just a bus driver*.

2. Then, all school employees should be "trained" regarding their personal communication responsibilities on the job and in the community as a representative of the school system. Each employee should be expected to:

- Be positive in comments about the people in school to friends and relatives.
- Make a report to a supervisor about a negative situation he or she has observed or knows of.
- Register a problem with the system's ombudsperson office, if the supervisor will not or cannot handle it.
- Raise questions on the job site with a superior about rumors and grapevine gossip that could cause harm to other people.
- When asked a question about school one cannot answer, find a way to have an answer given to the questioner in a few days.
- When the opportunity arises, agree to serve on an advisory committee or answer survey questions or offer suggestions. "Your system benefits from your ideas" should be a motto known and respected by all employees.

*Al Holliday*

# Translate Jargon

Consultant ***Kenneth Muir***, retired director of information for the Montgomery County Schools in Rockville, Maryland, urges, "Summarize bureaucratic 'stuff ' for the people within the school system. Get to the point and boil information down to the barest essentials.

"In our school district, central administrators frequently sent memos to many offices that had a tendency to pile up. Nobody read them because nobody understood them. We created *Management Memos*, a simple, easy-to-understand version of bureaucratic messages or requests. All messages came to the information office to be 'repackaged' into *Management Memos*. Each correspondence also contained a column noting who should benefit from the information, who sent it, action needed by when, and a phone number for follow-up. This certainly made other peoples' lives easier. Information thus was transmitted quickly, thoroughly and efficiently."

# Write Teacher's Own Books

***William Banach***, chairman of Banach, Banach & Cassidy Consulting in Ray, Michigan, suggests, "All teachers should write their own version of *The Teacher's Book*, extolling the who, what, when, where and why of student education. It's nothing more than an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper folded in half. The book should be written by each teacher and provided to every student and parent in the teacher's class at the beginning of the school year.

"The Book consists of four panels - a cover, two inside pages and a back," Banach suggests. "The cover extends a welcome: 'Welcome to Jane Brown's fourth grade class at Whitman School.' It also deals with the safety and security of the child.

"The second panel addresses information needs," he adds. "It tells who is in front of the student—the teacher's background and education. It also shares something personal about the teacher—perhaps that the teacher has a family, pets and hobbies. Parents and students want to know that the "teacher" has normal pastimes and interests.

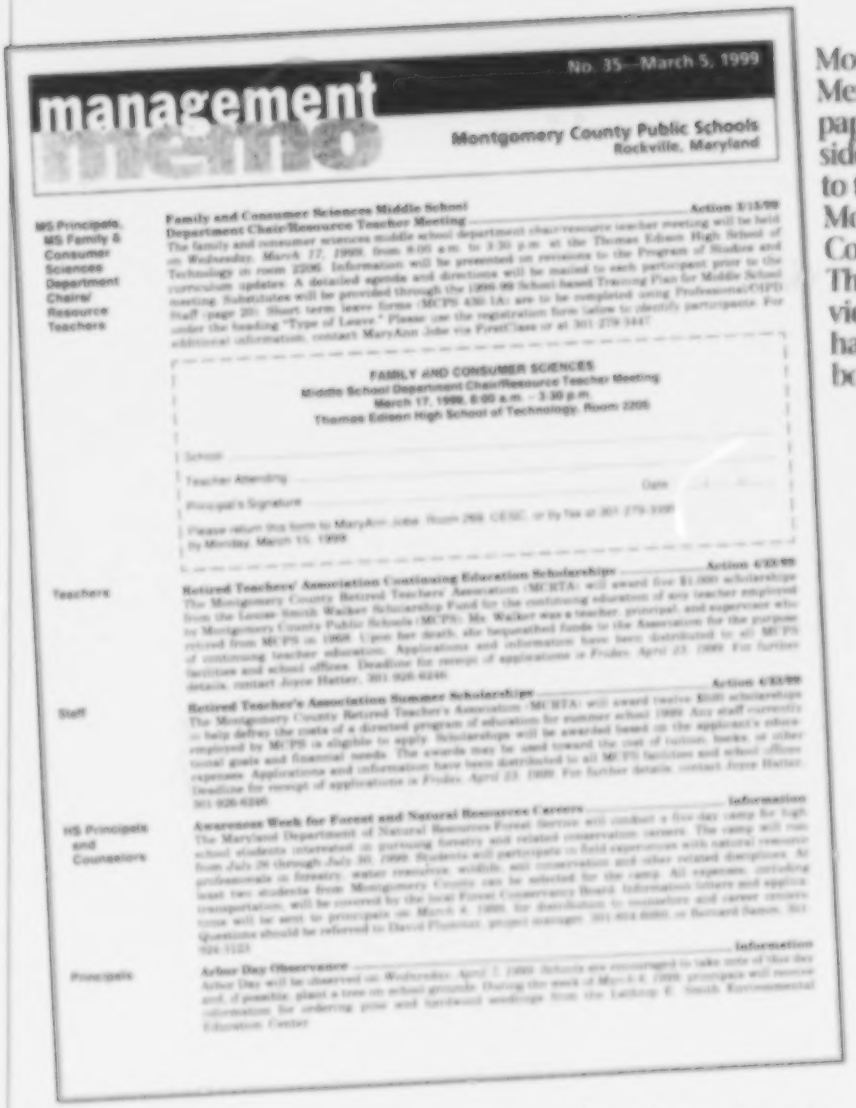
"The third panel tells what will happen in the classroom during the year. This simply gives a summary of the curriculum in a fun and exciting way and it ends with suggestions for parents' involvement in the education process, as well as parents' responsibilities."

Banach adds that secondary students may have five or six teachers. "In that case, each student will have five or six *Teacher Books*. Or, one can use the power of technology to create a single, individualized book for each student. This informs students and parents about the people on the instructional team.

"Using an in-service day for all teachers to create their 'book' may be the highest and best use of an in-service day," Banach concludes.

# Inform from a Realistic Base

***Patricia Crawford***, director of public affairs for Pittsburgh Public Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, emphasizes,



management memo

No. 35—March 5, 1999

Montgomery County Public Schools
Rockville, Maryland

MS Principals, MS Family & Consumer Sciences Department Chairs/ Resource Teachers

**Family and Consumer Sciences Middle School Department Chair/Resource Teacher Meeting** — Action 3/15/99

The family and consumer sciences middle school department chair/resource teacher meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 17, 1999, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Thomas Edison High School of Technology in room 2205. Information will be presented on revisions to the Program of Studies and curriculum updates. A detailed agenda and directions will be mailed to each participant prior to the meeting. Substitutes will be provided through the 1998-99 School-based Training Plan for Middle School Staff (page 20). Short term leave forms (MCPS 430-1A) are to be completed using Professional/SPD under the heading "Type of Leave." Please use the registration form below to identify participants. For additional information, contact MaryAnn Jobe via FirstClass or at 301 279-3447.

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES
Middle School Department Chair/Resource Teacher Meeting
March 17, 1999, 8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Thomas Edison High School of Technology, Room 2205

School _____

Teacher Attending _____ Date _____

Principal's Signature _____

Please return this form to MaryAnn Jobe, Room 268, CESC, or by fax at 301 279-3309 By Monday, March 15, 1999.

Teachers

**Retired Teachers' Association Continuing Education Scholarships** — Action 4/22/99

The Montgomery County Retired Teachers' Association (MCRTA) will award five $1,000 scholarships from the Louise Smith Walker Scholarship Fund for the continuing education of any teacher employed by Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Ms. Walker was a teacher, principal, and supervisor who retired from MCPS in 1968. Upon her death, she bequeathed funds to the Association for the purpose of continuing teacher education. Applications and information have been distributed to all MCPS facilities and school offices. Deadline for receipt of applications is Friday, April 23, 1999. For further details, contact Joyce Hatter, 301-926-6246.

Staff

**Retired Teacher's Association Summer Scholarships** — Action 4/22/99

The Montgomery County Retired Teacher's Association (MCRTA) will award twelve $500 scholarships to help defray the costs of a directed program of education for summer school 1999. Any staff currently employed by MCPS is eligible to apply. Scholarships will be awarded based on the applicant's educational goals and financial needs. The awards may be used toward the cost of tuition, books, or other expenses. Applications and information have been distributed to all MCPS facilities and school offices. Deadline for receipt of applications is Friday, April 23, 1999. For further details, contact Joyce Hatter, 301-926-6246.

HS Principals and Counselors

**Awareness Week for Forest and Natural Resources Careers** — Information

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service will conduct a five-day camp for high school students interested in pursuing forestry and related conservation careers. The camp will run from July 26 through July 30, 1999. Students will participate in field experiences with natural resource professionals in forestry, water resources, wildlife, soil conservation and other related disciplines. At least two students from Montgomery County can be selected for the camp. All expenses, including transportation, will be covered by the local Forest Conservancy Board. Information letters and application forms will be sent to principals on March 8, 1999, for distribution to counselors and career centers. Questions should be referred to David Plummer, project manager, 301-854-6060, or Barnard Gamon, 301-926-5123.

Principals

**Arbor Day Observance** — Information

Arbor Day will be observed on Wednesday, April 7, 1999. Schools are encouraged to take note of this day and, if possible, plant a tree on school grounds. During the week of March 8-12, 1999, principals will receive information for ordering pine and hardwood seedlings from the Ludlow E. Smith Environmental Education Center.

Montgomery Memos–one sheet of paper printed both sides–are sent weekly to the staff in Montgomery County Schools. They replace individual flyers that had clogged mailboxes.

"Talk about what is happening in the classroom. Inform the people about specifics.

"Our district uses performance-based assessments. We invite people in to see how they work and try them out for themselves," she says. "We want to show them the difference between standard testing and performance-based testing. Specifically, we want the parents to see the differences. Parents actually try the test to see how well they do, so they can understand how well their children will do.

"For example, several days prior to a recent parents meeting, we invited the media to an information session and to try out the testing," Crawford said. "We tested them. Reporters talked about their experience, and gave us front-page and top story coverage in local newspapers and on television. Because of the media coverage, the parents' event was well attended.

"The purpose was two-fold," she



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Focus on the classroom, says Pat Crawford, shown here in a Pittsburgh school. She invited parents and reporters into schools to take the same sort of tests students are given.

explained. "We educated the media and promoted the educational event to parents. As a result, parents were much more aware of the educational process their children go through and more comfortable with the assessment process."

## Grab Opportunities as They Arise

***James Lashley***, supervisor of communications for the Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Florida, stresses, "The best public relations ideas are the ones that communicate information most effectively.

"Look at opportunistic public relations. Look for opportunities," Lashley said. "Keep your eyes open for what you can do and jump on the program. Package an idea, rectified problem or situation so that it is 'sellable.' First, find something good. Second, put it in a theme or format. And third, go out and sell it.

"For example, Duval County schools lost their accreditation in the mid-sixties. Working a long and hard 15 years for re-accreditation, we used everything in our power to proclaim that achievement. Coincidentally, Duval County is the largest school district in the nation. So, there was our slogan: 'The nation's largest fully accredited school system.'

"We used the slogan everywhere, from a state legislature proclamation, to a large billboard on I-95, to an opportunity when the late Will Rogers, Jr. was in town and we persuaded him to be the 'voice' of our broadcast PSA announcements. Those PSAs received a lot of air play, getting our message across in a big way."

Lashley advises school practitioners to "keep your eyes open for opportunities, and see what you can do."

## The PR to School Missions

***Larry Ascough***, director of school and community relations for school district U-46 in Elgin, Illinois, advises, "Stay focused on the bottom line: educating our boys and girls.

"We need to help educators and

other school employees write mission statements that specify their roles in achieving student success. And we need to help them understand how to work with communication specialists to carry out their missions, all of which must relate in one way or another to student achievement and well-being."

## Plug into Technology

*Timothy Carroll*, director of information services for the Allen Independent School District in Allen, Texas, urges, "Embrace technology and use it as a public relations tool.

"All programs can be stronger if one embraces new technology in a big way. You have to keep up with technology because it is always changing.

"For example, we cross-reference our database to coordinate our key communicator program," Carroll reports. "We work with video, the Internet and the World Wide Web. Current technology must be incorporated into any communication program. Those who don't will find missed opportunities to communicate with their publics. Those who use it will be much more powerful communicators."

## Make the Media a Partner

*Peggy Lyons*, director of information for the Pittsford School District in Pittsford, New York, suggests, "Develop a routine way of getting information out about the schools to parents, the public and media.

"We have planted a seed called News Tips that has flourished beautifully," she says. "At the end of each month, we send an advisory of News Tips to all media in our area. These tip sheets cover activities and events that will happen in all our schools in the next 30 days. News Tips features 20 to 30 upcoming happenings each month, telling the who, what, when and where of each event or activity. Our intention is to get media coverage. But, we also want reporters to contact us for more information.

"After the coverage, we maintain a clip book that includes copies of the coverage and graphs of how many schools had coverage during the month and how much," she says. "We compile these books four times a year for principals to assess their programs. This tracking helps check what is working and allows us to adjust for what needs more emphasis.

"We get a positive response from reporters," Lyons concludes. "They call us if News Tips is not delivered at the usual time. The program is useful for them and helps our schools by informing our parents and community members."

## Focus on Improvements

*Kathy Leslie*, executive administrator for community involvement at the Beaverton School District in Beaverton, Oregon, emphasizes, "Always focus on students' improvement and their increased achievements.

"The officials in the organization and the people affected by it must work together to find solutions," Leslie says. "They must work with authenticity,

Peggy Lyons (below) issues a list of tips of possible feature articles for the following month for reference by reporters and others intersted in local schools.

Pittsford Central School District
42 W. Jefferson, 2nd. Pittsford, NY 14534
Contact: Peggy Lyons, 218-1031

## *March 1999 news tips from Pittsford schools*

March is Music in our Schools Month and Pittsford students join the rest of the country in celebrating music. Scheduled for this month are the following music events: Pittsford Sutherland concert on March 1, the PTSA Life Membership concert at Pittsford Sutherland High on March 2, *Bye Bye Birdie* musical performed by students at Pittsford Middle School March 3 through 6, the All-County Jazz Festival on March 5 and 6, All-County senior high music festival on March 12 and 13, Pittsford Middle School band concerts on March 10 and 11, the All-County Junior High Music Festival on March 19 and 20, the musical *Hello Dolly* by Pittsford Mendon High School on March 19-20, 42nd *Street* musical production at Pittsford Sutherland High School March 25-27, an Elementary All-County Music Festival on March 26 and 27, a Pittsford Middle School Concert on March 28, and Pittsford Mendon High School concerts on March 24, 25 and 30.

**March 4** Parents of children who are age eligible to attend kindergarten next year can talk to the Principal, school nurse, counselor and teachers at the Kindergarten Information Night at Park Road Elementary School at 7 p.m., at Thornell Road Elementary School on March 10 at 7:30 p.m. and at Mendon Center Elementary School on March 16 at 7 p.m.

**March 5** Using puppetry, music, dance, and a few students pulled right from the audience, Canada's favorite children's storyteller Barbara Poggemiller brings "**A Promise is a Promise,**" a delightful new play about an Arctic legend, to life for Thornell Road Elementary School students. Performances are at 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. performances in the gymnasium.

**March 6** Thirty-two Pittsford student teams (some 250 students) will join regional teams to compete in the **Odyssey of the Mind Regional Competition** at Spencerport High School. The competition is designed to **stimulate students' creative, problem-solving skills and teamwork.**

**March 8** It's **Safe Rider Week** at Park Road Elementary School. Kindergarten through third grade students will participate in **bus drills and learn safety rules** of the bus throughout the morning.

**March 9** A parent education session on "**Enhancing Children's Social Skills**" with speaker Dr. Dennis Boles. In a program designed for parents, family therapist Dr. Dennis Boles, will focus on how to develop and encourage the social skills in children. The program is at 7:30 p.m. at Pittsford Mendon High School. It is free and open to the community.

**March 10** **A square dancing open house** is planned for Allen Creek third grade classrooms. Parents will have an opportunity to see student work in the open house at 6:30 p.m. and join in some square dancing from 7-8 p.m.

**March 12** **Celebrity reader Gigi Mangione plays a return visit to Allen Creek Elementary School** where he will read a story to the third grade classes and treat them to a sample of his music. Mangione's repeat performance, he was a popular reader/performer on previous years, is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. in the school's music room.

**March 15** **"What's Next for My Child?" is the topic of an interactive seminar for Pittsford 6th grade students and their parents.** Counselor, Hugh Johnson, will be the presenter in the PTSA-sponsored program scheduled for 7-8:30 p.m. in the auditorium at Pittsford Middle School. The seminar will answer questions about early planning and provide information about college-seeking during high school.

integrity and in an atmosphere where people are honored.

"Everyone looks at issues from different perspectives, but each must respect differing opinions," she said. "This requires us in public relations/administration to move from knowers to learners. It requires us to be humble and flexible. We need to become the facilitators providing forums for people to dialog and reach shared understanding. Education needs administrators, teachers, parents and community members who work together and always stay focused on student success." ☙

Alisa Hogan is assistant director of admissions and publications specialist at Rowan University. She also is a student in Rowan's graduate public relations program.

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# How a New President Approaches the Communication Function

By: Jacob Farbman

ROWAN UNIVERSITY

As administrators take on new responsibilities, they might appreciate the following communication suggestions offered by Dan Farish, Rowan University's sixth president. Before coming to Rowan in 1998, he was the provost and vice president of Academic Affairs at Sonoma State University in California. Dr. Farish has served as assistant dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Rhode Island and as the dean of the School of Natural Sciences at Sonoma State University.

**Q. How important has public relations been during your first year on the job?**

A. I don't look at what I do as public relations *per se*, I look at relating to others as one part of being the president of Rowan University. Part of that incorporates building trust with others. Building trust is essential for any school administrator to succeed. If others can see that you have good intentions and that you are a good listener, they will begin to trust you. Trust certainly strengthens the relationship between an administrator and employees.

In addition, administrators should always work on public speaking skills. I worked on my public speaking for eight years while I was the vice president for academic affairs at Sonoma State. Now, when I have to give small speeches, I can take three minutes to think of points I need to cover while I'm going to the event. For me, speaking off the cuff is more effective than reading remarks that I didn't have a role in writing.

**Q. As a new administrator, what do you do to communicate with internal audiences?**

A. One of the mysteries at universities is that routine methods of communication don't work. Phone mail logs fill up quickly, some people don't check their e-mail and snail (posted) mail is sometimes ignored. Most of the time, snail mail isn't even seen.

A main challenge administrators face is sending messages that will be received to others without using conventional methods. I have found that the best way to communicate with others is through face-to-face communication.

One idea is to hold small meetings with groups of employees. I invited all of the faculty members of each college

*"One of the mysteries at universities is that routine methods of communication don't work. Phone mail logs fill up quickly, some people don't check their e-mail and snail (posted) mail is sometimes ignored. Most of the time, snail mail isn't even seen."*

on campus to breakfast meetings in groups of eight. These meetings gave faculty the chance to express themselves in small groups of people.

In comparison, at large group meetings, only a few people may have a chance to ask questions. If I hold a large meeting and only four people get a chance to participate, then I can't say that I have communicated effectively with all of our employees.

I meet with senior administrators on a regular basis. I attend all of the University Senate meetings. This way, I am making a constant effort to stay in touch with the staff.

When I first started the presidency last year, I sent out an open-ended survey to all the employees that asked, "What do we do well? What do we do not so well? What three things should I spend my time working on?" and "What other advice would you give me?" However, only 200 of the 1000 employees responded. Although I did get positive feedback, I can't say that I have effectively communicated with all of the employees - as yet - so, sometimes you miss.

It is important to get the audience personally involved when communicating. An administrator can't assume everyone is represented.

**Q. How do you communicate with external audiences?**

A. Communicating with external audiences is more difficult than communicating with internal ones. External audiences are living their own lives. People in the community who have a vested interest in the university usually have family members who attend classes here.

To reach out to the community when I first arrived at Rowan, I visited the local school superintendent, school board members and city council members. I held a reception to which I invited these groups; it went well. Hosting events helps to put a face on the university. I have tried to become someone that external audiences can identify and relate to by being visible in the community.

I met with the editorial board of the Gloucester County Times (the local daily newspaper), and discussed current issues in higher education.

Special events are another outlet for administrators. They are part of a university's life. I've attended basketball games, football games and concerts - not because it was part of the job, but because I've had a role to play in those events. Welcoming people to various events gives me the chance to be seen and heard by people I may not be in

Dr. Donald Farish became Rowan University's sixth president July 1, 1998. Farish has served as the assistant dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Rhode Island and as the dean of the School of Natural Sciences at Sonoma State University. Before coming to Rowan, he was the provost and vice president of academic affairs at Sonoma State University.

Photo courtesy of University Relations Office, Rowan University

contact with in any other capacity. Attending special events shows commitment, understanding and support.

To make contacts in the business community, I have had the assistance of the dean of the College of Business Administration.

**Q. What special communication challenges do new administrators face?**

A. The main challenge I face is to demonstrate knowledge and opinions to others without sounding like I know it all. I don't want to offend anyone, either. I try to demonstrate that I know what I'm talking about, although I am a "rookie" so to speak.

Every individual campus has its own culture. A new administrator can not assume that communication tactics that worked at a previous institution will work at the new institution. There is some tension in the time it takes for new administrators to get up to speed with the history and progress of a university.

**Q. As a seasoned administrator, what advice would you share with new administrators on how to communicate to generate better morale?**

A. Communication can help or hinder morale at an institution. Administrators must listen to what people have to say and take them seriously. They must deal with other people's perceptions. People often mistake their own perceptions for reality.

My advice is: After listening to others, act. However, don't promise more than you can deliver. Not delivering will shatter your credibility. Continue to stress face-to-face communication, and reach out to everyone in the community.

Jacob Fenhman is a public relations graduate student at Rowan University, where he works as a graduate assistant for the graduate public relations program. Before attending graduate school, he worked in educational public relations for two years.

*There is nothing so powerful as truth—and often no thing so strange.*

*Daniel Webster*

# Foster a Relationship between the *Business Community* and Schools

By Laura Timberman

It's no secret that the business community needs employees who are well prepared for the world of work. And youngsters need a variety of real-world experiences to supplement classroom learning about working in the commercial world and about the demands and needs of the market place.

Establishing a partnership between your school and local employers can provide students with rich learning experiences and can create a positive rapport among the community, businesses and the school.

Involving the business community in helping to prepare students for the workplace is not a new idea. Vocational students have benefited from participation in cooperative vocational education programs for decades. What is new is the way in which the traditional work experience component is expanding to reach students from elementary school to college and the way people in the business world are reacting to assist with this initiative.

Washington State Secretary of Labor ***Carver C. Gayton*** addressed this issue while employed with the Boeing Company. Gayton said, "At Boeing, we have seen first-hand that true collaboration between business and education can work and that all the players—in essence, the community at large—can benefit."[1]

The federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 provided grant funds that enabled schools to create partnerships with businesses. New Jersey was one of eight states to receive initial funding to develop School-to-Work programs. Now known as School-to-Careers Initiatives, these programs continue to grow, providing career awareness and exploration and workplace experience opportunities for students.

In Salem County, New Jersey, the local vocational technical school district is responsible for the county-wide School-to-Careers project. Planning and implementing school-based and work-based activities are a key element of School-to-Careers. At the elementary school level, students have been exposed to careers through guest speakers. Young students have had the chance to choose a career that sounds interesting to them and to "job shadow" someone working in that field. (Job shadowing allows a student to observe and follow an employee.)

Salem County Vo-Tech's School-to-Careers Program Coordinator ***Mary Coombs*** recently set up a school-based

> "...***students who worked*** had higher attendance rates, lower dropout rates, lower suspension rates, higher graduation rates, and higher promotion rates than ***students who did not work***."

learning project for some middle school students. These students took a field trip to the vocational school to learn about career opportunities in the multi-media computer field. Then they were shown how to use a multi-media software program to create presentations. The students entered their presentations in a state history competition.

Students in two Salem County Vo-Tech Career Center courses recently partnered with operators of a nearby golf course as a School-to-Careers project. This new golf course was scheduled to open in the spring of 1999. Design and drafting students gained hands-on experience by designing drawings for the golf course. Students in an environmental sciences class have been involved in setting up and stocking the golf course's five fish ponds. This partnership resulted in local media coverage of the students visiting the golf course. Manager David Cohen was quoted in the county newspaper stating that working with the vo-tech students is of mutual benefit to the golf course and the students.

What exactly do employers gain by forming partnerships with schools? In the New Jersey School-to-Careers Guide for Employers, benefits for employers listed included:

- An expanded pool of qualified workers
- A reduction in turnover
- A voice in school curriculum development to meet industry needs
- A reduction in training costs
- The ability to improve the quality of life and work skills in the community.

According to Trenton, New Jersey, business owner ***Robert Groom***, "If you train a person, that person will earn more money, spend more money, and stay in the community longer than an untrained person. A higher skilled person should be able to put more back into the community."[1]

What do students gain by participating in school-business partnerships? Exposure to different careers and work experience are two benefits. In some cases, students involved in work experience programs are hired full-time upon graduation from high school.

Students in the secretarial and computer applications course at Salem County Vo-Tech have had the opportunity to be involved in several different partnerships with the business community. One of these partnerships is a vocational education work program. In this students with a "B" grade or above average and good attendance can work in offices as part-time, paid employees. They receive course credit, earn a paycheck, and gain work experience. The cooperative education coordinator monitors their progress and supervises them.

Office employees in the local hospital hosted the secretarial students. The employees spent time explaining their job responsibilities to the students. By the end of the week, students were given the opportunity to perform some of the tasks alongside hospital employees.

Post-secondary adult students

enrolled in the secretarial course are participants in paid and non-paid internships. Similar to cooperative education work programs, the internship experience is designed to help the students gain work experience to enhance classroom learning. Student ***Marcella Smith*** is doing her internship at an insurance company. She states, "I'm learning in the classroom and at my job. I'm excited about this opportunity." Internship employers serve on an advisory committee for the secretarial program. Meeting with the teacher, the employers provide input regarding equipment, textbook recommendations, and workplace trends for the course.

Another way schools can work with the business world is by involving employers in student organization projects. Members of the Salem County Vo-Tech Phi Beta Lambda chapter prepared a written and oral account of their job shadowing alliance with an insurance agency. Their presentation received first place at the 1997 New Jersey Chapter State Competitions. The insurance agency's president, nominated by the Vo-Tech's chapter members, received an award for "Businessperson of the Year." The insurance agency has continued to partner with the vocational school by employing students through the cooperative work program and by participating in school advisory committees.

At a recent State Board of Education meeting, New Jersey Director of the Office of School-to-Careers *Thomas Henry* pointed out further advantages for students involved in partnerships with business. Henry stated that, according to studies on school-to-work in Philadelphia and Boston, ***students who worked*** had higher attendance rates, lower dropout rates, lower suspension rates, higher graduation rates, and higher promotion rates than ***students who did not work.***[3]

What do educators and students gain by pairing up with the business community? Students excited about learning, businesspersons eager to assist in the educational process, and community support for the school are all benefits. By working with those in the business community and listening to what they need, school leaders will help to improve the overall image of education as well as helping students achieve well in realistic settings they are likely to face after graduation.

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Laura Tamberrino is a cooperative business education coordinator and instructor at Salem County Vocational Technical Schools in Woodstown, NJ. She also serves as the media consultant for the schools and is pursuing a master's degree in public relations at Rowan University.

# Create Effective and Attractive *School District-Community Newsletters*

By Tobias Brahe

Newsletters can serve many purposes, from fundraising to internal communication. Often they become the medium of choice of many organizations to deliver their messages to different target audiences.

School district officials should use newsletters to build positive relationships with their communities by informing parents and other community members about their schools. Ninety-five percent of parents in one survey said that newsletters provide an important source of information.[1] Therefore, professionally produced newsletters can become powerful communication tools for school districts.

Jody Rettig, a former public relations graduate student at Rowan University, acknowledged the importance of community newsletters and devoted her research efforts to determining what ingredients successful newsletters should contain. In her 1994 thesis, Creating Effective and Attractive School District Community Newsletters, Rettig gathered vital information from newsletter editors, contest judges and the literature to help school communicators produce publications that captivate their audiences.

## Writing and Content

Successful editors write their newsletters for an eighth-grade reading level and know how to use consistent style, simple words, short sentences and paragraphs, active voice, and direct quotes to aim their publications at the target audiences. However, many educators forget they are competing for readership.[2] A school newsletter must compete with newspapers, magazines, television, not to mention people's work and leisure activities that use up each day's time.

Newsletters are one of the most effective way to keep parents involved. However, newsletters are often begun by schowol officials because neighboring districts have newsletters. Hiring a person who is untrained for this task

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## To make the most of your newsletter, follow these simple guidelines:

by Christine Dunnington

- Be consistent throughout the newsletter (fonts, heads) and in subsequent issues.
- Use bold and italic sparingly.
- Use serif for body copy; sans serif for heads.
- Always have pictures face the center of the page. A picture facing off the page takes the reader's eye away from the content.
- Photos attract readers to a story. People like to see action rather than poses. Make sure the subject is relevant to your audience. Close-ups of people create more interest than scenery. Always get written permission to use a photo from the subjects and the photographer.
- When using photos or illustrations, always include captions.
- Bar and pie charts are easier to read than line graphs.
- Check spelling on every article, headline and caption.

Christine Dunnington is a graduate assistant in the Publications Office at Boston University, where she is a student in the Graduate Public Relations Program.

can result in insufficient audience research and a publication with poor layout and design, scattered content, and distribution to the wrong audiences. School officials committed to inform their communities should:

- Communicate with non-parents as well as parents, as non-parents can make up 60 to 85 percent of a district's community.
- Consider different publications for different audiences.
- Publish newsletters on a regular basis. Regular distribution sparks and influences home-school communication. Publish monthly and use special issues for events needing extra attention.[1]

Excellent writing is a key to excellence. The selection of topics for articles is just as critical, to make the content "must read" in the community.

The must-read stories usually center on students. Parents prefer stories that inform about school events and activities, special reports on student progress, and instructions on how they might improve children's academic skills.[2]

### Typefaces

An important first step by an editor is selecting a large enough and readable typeface. Body text should never go below eight-point type. Many authorities recommend selecting type from the following typefaces when producing a newsletter: Cheltenham, Century, Times Roman, Baskerville, Bodoni, Caslon, Helvetica and Optima.[3]

### Layout and Design

Today, most schools have enough desktop publishing capabilities to produce their newsletters in-house. Knowing this, Rettig suggests these tips:

- Readership increases when editors add extra white space between paragraphs.[4]
- Photographs should be produced as halftones.
- A second color helps give the

News and Views
"Teaching Children To Think and Dream"
Great Valley School District
On Line
Safety keywords: Prevention and intervention
dents, Gov. Ridge in electronic town meeting

newsletter a distinctive appearance, looks attractive, makes reading easier and helps gain readership.

• Using poor art is worse than no art at all because it makes publications look amateurish.

## Distribution

Distributing newsletters should not create headaches. A lot of schools use "kid mail," meaning leaving it up to students to deliver the newsletters to their parents. But research shows that, after the fifth grade, most students toss the newsletter away before arriving at home.7

The information Rettig gathered concerning alternative distribution methods suggests editors consider these options:

• Paying student groups to deliver newsletters.

• Using third class, non-profit, bulk mail and asking parent groups to fund mailings.

• Asking local businesses to place copies of newsletters in their stores for free distribution to their customers.

## Evaluation

Rettig writes about the importance of evaluating all the work school officials put into producing their community newsletters. Experts agree that the comments received through reader feedback and research should spark changes. This way, newsletters ensure continued or increased readership.8 School editors can evaluate their publications using several methods:

• Write a question and answer section in each newsletter.

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• Insert a questionnaire or survey in the newsletters.

• Conduct focus groups annually or semi-annually and ask members for their opinions.

• Call parents randomly and ask for input.

• Ask for feedback at parent meetings.

Rettig asked contest winners and judges about what makes a winning newsletter. Contest winners pointed to: good photographs; clear and concise writing; and balanced, clean, simple and attractive design. Judges added that short, punchy leads keep people reading. In addition, judges point to the importance of graphics and artwork, claiming they enhance the printed word. Judges also stressed the importance of two-way communication and encouraged school officials to conduct research and keep the lines of communication open.

Tobias Bruhn is a public relations graduate student at Rowan University, where he works as a graduate assistant for the Glassboro Center of the Arts.

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*Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects.*

*Will Rogers*

# PR Directors Can Benefit from Student Researchers

By: Laura E. Litrenta

Although seldom considered, students can make effective public relations researchers. At Rowan University, students participate in and conduct research to gather community opinions and attitudes regarding bond referenda in nearby school districts.

Public relations research can be used to determine how people in a community think and act. Knowing these patterns helps educational leaders create and disseminate messages concerning their schools' needs. Once these messages circulate among the community, members can have a better understanding of and eventually support proposed school issues.

## Involving Students Is Cost Effective

Gaining valuable experiences in data collection and analysis, students can participate in research opportunities that include conducting telephone surveys, analyzing survey data, moderating focus panels and recording focus panel data.

Encouraging students to conduct research produces numerous benefits for school public relations practitioners. Both efficient and cost effective, student researchers allow practitioners to acquire valid data while saving time and money.

## Conducting Telephone Surveys

By conducting telephone surveys, students can develop and enhance their professional public relations skills. Practicing interpersonal communication techniques, student surveyors learn the importance and benefits of articulate speech and active listening.

Karla Guido, a Rowan University student surveyor, says, "The reason I conduct phone surveys is because they provide opportunities to practice my communication skills. I like to be a part of research because positive results from my work are rewarding and I know that I was part of the process. The textbook techniques I learn in research class come to life."

Practitioners can attract students to research by emphasizing the value and benefits of research experience, describing the demand for researchers in the public relations field and offering to pay for research services.

Although students are not professional researchers, practitioners can train them to conduct professional phone interviews. Some tips for training student interviewers include:

- **Emphasizing the use of clear and**

> "Both efficient and cost effective, student researchers allow practitioners to acquire valid data while saving time and money."

articulate speech

- Teaching active listening methods.
- Suggesting ways to remain objective.
- Describing the survey's purpose.
- Explaining the survey sample's demographic information.

## Analyzing Survey Data

Practitioners will find that analyzing survey data can become an expensive task as many professional researchers charge high fees. With the help of student researchers, however, data analysis becomes not only possible, but also practical.

By offering instructional sessions, practitioners can encourage students to use statistical-based computer software to process and analyze survey data. Once these programs become familiar to students, they can input data and provide significant statistical information.

Clearly, practitioners can offer students the opportunity to conduct primary research. Through survey data analysis, students can view and digest survey results while they sharpen their critical thinking skills.

## Moderating and Recording Focus Panels

In addition to conducting telephone surveys, students can conduct research via focus panels.

Moderating focus panels allows students to experience the impact of face-to-face communication. Identifying the power of this communication method, students can improve their management and organizational skills and learn methods for communicating with small groups. Students can improve their public speaking skills, dialogue and interview methods, and interpersonal communication techniques. "I ran a focus panel with graduate students last semester and the experience showed me how different groups of people feel and act," says Kim Brown, a Rowan University student moderator.

Stressing the importance of articulate speech and active listening, practitioners can mold students into effective focus panel facilitators. Training must also incorporate lessons in recognizing various traits of people and managing a group of individuals who have differing goals.

As focus panel recorders, students also can play an important role in research. Recording focus panel data requires students to listen keenly and observe panel discussions. Recorders document the respondents' words and expressions. This activity allows students to contribute to primary research while they concentrate on details, a skill practitioners consider essential to success in the field.

## Participating in Other Campaign Activities

Although student involvement in school financial issue campaigns can induce controversy within communities, educational leaders should not dismiss the notion. By law, students may conduct research or participate in other campaign efforts; however, they must refrain from actions that solicit affirmative community votes. Appropriate student campaign activities include:

- Speaking at advisory committee meetings, public hearings and town meetings.
- Distributing informational brochures, newsletters and other publications.
- Providing residents with transportation to voting sites.
- Assisting in voter registration drives.
- Participating in informational video news releases, public service announcements, advertisements, interviews and publication photographs.
- Organizing a committee that targets absentee ballot voters.
- Participating in focus-panel discussions.

## Conclusion

Clearly, school practitioners can benefit from student research work. Encouraging students to conduct telephone surveys, analyze survey data and moderate and record focus panels allows practitioners to gather information and measure the opinions and attitudes of target communities. Consequently, student researchers can sharpen their organizational, managerial and communication skills and gain valuable experience in a demanding public relations field.

While working on her master's degree in public relations, Laura E. Litrenta serves as a graduate assistant for the Communication Institute at Rowan University. With an interest in corporate public relations, she conducts primary research for the institute's local and national clients. She has based information in this article on her experience, as well as the text The School and Community Realtions, Prentice Hall, 1997.

## Abstract

School practitioners can encourage students to participate in and conduct research to gather community opinions and attitudes toward school issues. Gaining valuable experiences in data collection and analysis, students can participate in research opportunities that include conducting telephone surveys, analyzing survey data, moderating focus panels and recording focus panel data.

# Use Radio
## in Your School PR Program

By Steve Randik

School public relations practitioners should use radio to do more than announce school closings. According to Larry Litwin, a Rowan University instructor, school PR practitioners should use radio to:

- Educate the public concerning the work of educators,
- Introduce new policies and procedures,
- Invite community cooperation,
- Awaken interest in education, and
- Explain the need for financial support.

"School public relations people should use radio because of its immediacy," Litwin says. "It is an instant medium, and it can serve as a proactive measure during a crisis to get your school's message out quickly."

Another reason school practitioners use radio is because of its highly segmented nature. "Radio also allows school PR people to zero in on target audiences as many stations broadcast to local communities or specific groups of people."

Litwin worked in public relations for school districts in Pennsylvania and in Southern New Jersey. He was a staffer at ABC News radio in New York for three years and KYW television and radio in Philadelphia for 10 years.

According to Litwin, school PR people benefit from the use of radio because it's comfortable, quick, easy, focused and captive. He noted that radio offers results that are free or inexpensive. "PR directors can influence their target audiences by sending messages right to people's homes or cars and it is easy for a spokesperson to get on the air at a radio station compared to a television station. It only takes a telephone to get your message on the air."

Public relations directors should include radio when writing a school public relations plan. "Radio has the benefit of reaching many people in a short time," he said. "I used radio successfully when I worked for school systems to promote a bond issue and to recruit," he says. "Many school boards have recruited new superintendents by using radio to broadcast their openings." As in all activities in a PR plan, proper uses of radio will require someone to devote time to it. School people may wish to consider a part time per-

son–a volunteer or an intern–to coordinate PR tasks involving radio.

"But," he added, "a message geared **toward students** must be sent to a different radio station than ones **directed at parents or seniors**. Radio has an advantage of reaching whatever target audience is desired, but not everyone at the same station. The important part of this consideration is picking the right radio station to fit your target audience.

"A PR person can get the message to the radio stations by news releases, PSAs, pre-recorded programs, scripts, audio news releases, voice cuts, talk shows and call-in shows, among other venues," he suggests.

"Spot announcements can give information or request support for special school undertakings. They can be produced in 10-, 20-, 30- or 60-second formats.

"Infomercials, if regularly scheduled, can develop a regular audience. Questions of the day can be used as teasers. The answers are usually given later in the program or announcement," Litman adds.

According to him, some local station managers will be willing to broadcast a school's athletic events. "They would also consider playing live performances from the school's band, choir or other musical groups."

Discussion programs are used for topics of general interest. He notes that a roundtable format consisting of panel members with differing views can lend itself to an interesting show.

"Options for the use of radio are as open as one can creatively use the medium," he concludes "and as open as the time one can devote to the task."

DAILY MAGAZINE C

A newswatch on Newsradio

## Larry Litwin's Tips for Using Radio

1. Radio can be a proactive measure to use in a crisis.

2. Radio allows you to send a message to your target audience because of its segmented nature.

3. Radio offers immediate results with a credible message.

4. Radio allows the school public relations practitioner to reach a large audience in a short time.

Steve Kendik is a graduate public relations student at Kansas University. He works as a graduate assistant at Kansas Radio, WIBX-FM.

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Permit #152
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## A Two Minute PR drill #2

# A Check List for Involving People

*By Albert E. Holliday*

My PR Drill #1dealt with **Listening** as the first component in structuring an excellent communication program. Knowing what people in the school system and the community want, need, and expect of their schools is the only valid foundation of a PR plan.

Now I focus on **Involving People**. Each person in the community ought to have an opportunity to become involved, formally or informally, with their school sometime during the year. People--individuals or groups such as club members or business people--can become involved at the school level or at the system level in one or more ways. Here is a check list of possibilities for the staff to consider offering to residents as well as parents:

- Help form an alumni foundation
- Offer a business partnership to 11th grader
- Work as an aide in the library
- Become a student mentor
- Serve as coordinator of volunteers
- Take photos for the school's newsletter
- Sponsor an award for special student achievement
- Conduct student tours of a museum
- Write a guest article for the high school newspaper
- Be a volunteer in the PR office
- Join an advisory committee
- Instruct staff on how to use the Internet
- Be a classroom tutor
- Serve on a "recognition of success" committee
- Help write a school survey instrument
- Sponsor a summer internship for students
- Conduct a mini workshop about your hobby for 6th graders

There is only one catch to all these: your residents and business people and parents have to be informed of these possibilities. You have to **ask** people to be involved--**they will respond when they realize you really care.**

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# The Journal of Educational RELATIONS

PS 020192

Our 25th Year

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## Are CEOs Willing To Take the Initiative

In this issue, David Alan Gilman reviews the problems associated with the current over-emphasis by too many people on test scores.

The three possible solutions Gilman presents will require substantial efforts, especially by school officials, to make the public aware of the realities in today's schools. National or even local media and newspaper reporters won't do this for school officials, because reporters themselves are part of the problem. They report the "news," usually negative that some people with vested private interests have supplied.

That means that public school officials, on a local or state basis, must take the initiative to show people what a high school diploma should and does stand for, what criteria are used to decide a promotion, what standards students are expected to meet – all apart from standardized tests, SAEs and the like.

They will need to point out, with specifics for Gilman's solution #2, the real achievements of our schools, especially on a local and regional basis. For example, Gerald Bracey points out that "U.S. students today read better than ever and know more math and science than their parents and grandparents did... That dropout (from school before graduation) rates are improving and have been for a number of years... that the U.S. worker is the most productive in the world." (See Bracey's *Responses about Misconceptions about U.S. Public Schools*, 906 Di. 1250 N. Fox St., Alexandria, VA 22314-1997.) What are the major, and even many minor successes of schools in your state or region? Who is making efforts to broadcast this information, on a regular basis, to the public and via what media?

School officials often respond to the question, "Why don't you have a PR Program?," by saying people in their communities generally are satisfied with their local schools. This is reflected in the annual Gallup Poll on Education, reported in *Phi Delta Kappan*. However, the citizenry are influenced in the national media such as magazines and television by negative reports about individual school systems failures usually in urban areas and by so-called national experts who claim public education is "failing." Without rebuttals on a regular basis, people can be led to think that charter schools, choice programs and tuition "grants" for private schools should replace the status quo.

If school officials continue to be passive, the character of education offered to young people will certainly change in the new century, and not necessarily for the better for young people, parents, taxpayers and society at large.

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This journal has a wide variety of readers from communications specialists to CEOs to board members and college professors.

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Albert E. Hollibaugh
Editor-Publisher

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EDUCATIONAL RELATIONS: The Journal of Educational Relations (ISSN 0013 [illegible])
Editor-in-Chief: Albert E. Anthony • Associate Editor: Jane H. Anthony
Book reviews: Arthur H. Sachs

The Journal of Educational Relations is published quarterly by the Educational Communication Center, Box 657, Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657. Telephone 717-761-4135.
Copyright 1999

Subscriptions: Individual rate, $48 per year. Single copies, $15.
Library rate, $60 per year. Single copies, $20.
Add $16 for subscriptions outside of the United States.
Payment in U.S. funds.

Periodicals postage paid at Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Journal of Educational Relations*, P.O. Box 657, Camp Hill PA 17001-0657.

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***The highest result of education is tolerance.***

*Helen Keller (1913)*

# Consider These Techniques to Become a Proactive Principal

by Elaine K. McEwan

**How do you feel when confronted** by an angry, troubled, or frightened parent? If your heart begins to palpitate and your palms grow sweaty, welcome to the club.

Few of us can thrive on continual conflict and confrontation, even though high-stress encounters often seem to be at the top of our to-do list every day.

What steps can you as a school official take to reduce the frustration and futility that many parents feel when they come in your front door? How can you become a "proactive" principal rather than a "reactive" one, and reduce your, and parents', stress?

Developing solid home-school partnerships is an important aspect of instructional leadership for lots of reasons, not the least of which is reducing your own stress level. Consider these benefits:

**•Students are more successful in school when their parents and school personnel work closely and cooperatively;**

**•Parents will be more supportive and willing to give educators the "benefit of the doubt," even in stress-filled and emotional encounters, when there is a history of working together; and**

**•Everyone in the schooling business (parents, teachers, administrators and students) will benefit from two-way information-sharing and collaborative problem solving.**

Build a strong base of parental involvement and support in your school by becoming a proactive principal. Here are some ideas currently being used by your colleagues around the country.

## A. Share Decision Making

Involve parents in a site-based decision making groups or an advisory board. Many teachers and administrators are wary of inviting parents to sit in on heated discussions about school improvement or policy. But if you provide training and support, as well as set guidelines, you won't be sorry. Too often educators make decisions that will have an impact on the community without ever bothering to ask people in the community for their input.

Even more damaging to our credibility than not asking, however, is requesting input and expecting parents to "rubber-stamp" documents that were already written or decisions that were already made. A friend of mine recently spent a harrowing nine

months as the member of a district task force to evaluate the success of an instructional program. She could have saved herself a lot of time and grief if she had realized from the outset that the administrators didn't really want her to "participate" in the evaluation; they just wanted her name on the committee roster.

## B. Manage by Walking Around

Keep your antennae waving as you encounter parents informally, at church or synagogue, in the aisles of the grocery store, at sports events, or at Kiwanis Club. Ask the people you meet what they **like** about what's happening at your school. Ask them what you're **not doing** that you could be doing. And, even if it's painful, ask them what you're doing at school that should be **eliminated**. Ask them if they're **upset** about anything that's going on. Monitor your parents through surveys, phone polls, asking questions, and having an open door policy. You can detect subtle trends, pick up on a snowballing problem, or even receive an unsolicited compliment if you tune in to the informal parent network. Give parents permission to be honest with you.

Carry a notebook or some 3x5 cards with you at all times. When parents raise concerns, jot down the date, the concern, and what you promised to do about it. You may not be able to solve a problem or give a parent exactly what he/she wants, but you can listen and be responsive.

## C. Beware of Telephone Technology

Press 1 if you know your party's extension. Press 2 if you are reporting an absence. Press 3 if your child forgot his lunch money. Press 4 if you've forgotten why you called. Press 5 if you have a desperate desire to tell your story to a "real" human being. Press 6 to return to the operator. By this time, the caller is pounding the desk in frustration. He never got to an operator in the first place. How can he "return"?

If you do have an automated voice mail system in your school (and who doesn't these days), by all means, test-drive it from the consumer's end. Call your school from an outside line. Pretend that you don't know your party's extension. Pretend that you don't speak English. Pretend that you don't know the first three letters of the principal's last name. Pretend that you have an urgent need to get a message to your child regarding a family emergency.

Or, better yet, **leave a message** for the secretary, the nurse, and the school psychologist and see how long it takes each individual to get back to you. You'll know that your telephone system (and your staff) needs fine-tuning when **none** of **your** phone calls are returned. Just imagine how many parents out there are still waiting to hear from you. Call your highly promoted homework hotline and see if all of the announcements and assignments are up-to-date. I'll bet you lunch in the school cafeteria that Mr. Hallowell's math assignment message hasn't been changed for a month. Send a cheerful reminder to him ASAP.

Parents and even outsiders need a user-friendly and fail-safe way to communicate with school personnel. Give your secretary a raise and hire an office assistant. It will be money well spent on school-community relations.

Alexander Graham Bell's invention

isn't all bad, however. Think about how you can use the technology to improve communications between parents and teachers. Find ways to install telephones in teachers' classrooms so they can easily phone parents and parents can reach them. Be sure to include a voice mail option so that incoming calls that arrive during classroom instruction will not disturb the class. Professionals in most businesses have their own phone lines and this provision for teachers eliminates lost messages and secretarial gridlock.

### D. Work with Key Communicators

Some of the most influential communicators regarding your school are classified staff members. If you're implementing a new program, explain it to the bus drivers, crossing guards, cafeteria workers, secretaries, and maintenance staff. They wield considerable influence in the community and their conversations in grocery stores, barber shops, and the corner diner will help to shape parental and public opinion of your school (for good or evil).

I advise parents who are checking out a new school or district to talk to this group of employees first. They tell the unvarnished truth. They won't put the sophisticated spin on what's happening like the superintendent or director of community relations. If a school has a discipline problem, these folks are on the front line. If a school has safety issues, the custodians will be talking about it. If the teachers are disgruntled about a new textbook series, the classroom aides will be sure to spill the beans.

# 27 Questions to Learn If Your School Is Parent Friendly

If you (as a parent) had a choice, would you choose the school to which your children have been assigned?

The parents who write questions to my weekly newspaper column or call me often ask me when I appear on radio talk shows how to tell if a school is a fine one. (In the district in which I live, there is an open enrollment policy; parents can choose any school. They only have to provide transportation if the school they choose is not in their assigned attendance area.)

Here is a list of "research" questions I provide to help parents make their decision. How would you respond if a parent came knocking on your office door asking for this information? Would you be able to provide evidence that your school is one in which parents are welcomed, encouraged, validated, supported, and heard?

1. Does the school have any climate assessment results (e.g. responses from a questionnaire sent to all parents)? Have you recently given any "satisfaction surveys" to students, parents, and teachers? What are the results?

2. Do parents serve on any site-based decision-making teams? How are they chosen? What kinds of decisions do they make?

3. What is the level of participation in the PTA/PTO organization? How are the officers chosen? What are

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the goals of the organization? What kinds of projects have been the supported during the past three years?

4. What specific activities are organized to promote parent participation?

5. What types of written communication do parents regularly receive from the school (e.g. monthly newsletters, weekly teacher letters)? Ask to see back copies of these documents.

6. Does the school distribute parent involvement information, including how parents can observe and/or volunteer in classrooms, and procedures for contacting the principal and teachers with concerns?

7. Does the school have an office for the parents' organization in the building? Is there a bulletin board for posting parent information?

8. Is there a coordinator (either paid for by the school or as part of the PTA/PTO organization) of volunteers in the school or the district?

9. Are parent training opportunities available to enhance volunteer quality?

10. What are the policies with regard to hiring parents as aides/lunchroom helpers/playground supervisors? Would I be eligible to work as an employee, if qualified, at the school my children attend?

11. Is there a regular "curriculum night" when parents can hear a presentation from the teacher about what is being taught in the classroom and what the teacher's specific expectations are for students?

12. Is there a homework hotline that contains pre-recorded messages from teachers and the principal about assignments and activities?

Continued on page 9

## E. Give Advance Warning before Change

If you're going to make a change at your school, even if it's something as minor (to you) as the direction in which the cars move in the traffic circle, give parents lots of warning. Changing things like lunch schedules, report cards, course offerings, sports eligibility rules, immunization requirements, or transportation schedules without warning (and sometimes even with) can put parents in an uproar. Take time before you make the change to consult and communicate. Newsletters, telephone trees, press releases, cable broadcasts, and public hearings are just a few of the ways to get the word out. People don't like change, even if it's needed. They need time to prepare, ask questions, deal with the ramifications, and make their case for the status quo.

## F. Recognize Single Parent Needs

Recognize the special needs of single-parent families. Be willing to set aside your traditional notions of a "good" family in order to benefit children who are being raised in more "contemporary" families. Provide childcare for social events and parent-teacher conferences so those single parents can more easily attend. Accommodating the needs of divorced parents often means going out of your way to provide dual report cards and separate parent-teacher conferences. But the payback in good will and support for a child already torn between mom and dad is worth it. Some boards are even willing to ease a district's residency rules while families are in transition.

## G. Put Out the Welcome Mat

Make your school an inviting place to visit. Provide signs that welcome visitors and point them to the office. If there is only one entrance through which visitors to the building can enter, place signs on all outside doors indicating where that entrance can be found. Create an atmosphere where teachers, students, and other staff members routinely greet school visitors and ask if they can help them.

Sensitize your staff and student body to the importance of their conversations, attitudes, and behavior in hallways and common areas of the building. Community members and parents are judging you and your school every time they visit. If they witness an episode of inappropriate behavior by a staff member with his/her class, the news will travel quickly. If your parent community speaks languages other than English, make every effort to have someone on your staff who is available to translate.

Display student artwork and other class projects to communicate the emphasis on learning that is present in your building. Take a quick walk through your school and view it through the eyes of a stranger. Is there graffiti in the rest rooms? Get it cleaned up immediately. Are students jostling each other in the hallways? See what can be done to ease the congestion at certain periods of the day. Do you hear a teacher screaming at her students? Talk with her about how her behavior might be perceived by a first-time visitor.

Retailers often send "spies" into their stores or restaurants to see how employees treat customers. Develop a checklist with your faculty and then invite a "stranger" in to evaluate the

Continued from page 8

13. Is there a school website that contains everything that a parent would want to know about the school?

14. Is child-care provided for important school meetings?

15. Are regular parent-teacher conferences offered at times that are convenient for parents? (E.g. evening conferences for working parents, dual conferences for divorced parents).

16. Are translators provided for meetings in which non-English speaking parents will be in attendance (e.g. PTA/PTO meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and staffings)?

17. Are parents welcome to observe in their children's classrooms?

18. Do teachers respond to parental requests within one day (e.g. returning phone calls, writing notes)?

19. Can parents request meetings with individual teachers or teacher teams and be assured of a prompt response?

20. Is there a "clique" of parents who are able to manipulate the principal and teachers?

21. Are newcomers to the school able to become readily involved?

22. What procedures are in place to handle a parental concern regarding curriculum?

23. What procedures are in place to handle a parental concern regarding a teacher?

24. How are students assigned to classrooms? Can parents make requests? What is my recourse if my child is assigned to a teacher I find unacceptable?

25. Are parents kept apprised of key policy decisions made at both the school and district level?

26. Are notices of PTO/PTA and school board meetings published and/or posted regularly?

27. Are parents notified promptly if their child is having an academic or a behavior problem?

items on it.

## H. Speak the Language of the People

Provide important materials to parents in their native language. Whenever possible, report cards, handbooks, notices of meetings, and all special education documents should be published in the languages spoken by the parents of your students. Provide translators at important meetings that focus on individual students (e.g. parent-teacher conferences or staffings) as well as for school-wide meetings like PTA or Home-School-Council. If other languages are spoken in your school, offer language classes for credit so that more staff members will be able to communicate with parents. Although fluency in a foreign language is a goal that takes some time to achieve, even the smallest gestures of staff members toward communication will be noted and appreciated by parents.

## I. Connect With Cable

Use your local access cable TV station to communicate with parents. One principal I know has a monthly Fireside Chat program and another regularly reads stories aloud via TV. Broadcasting musical concerts and school plays enables parents to enjoy school events if their schedule has kept them from attending.

## J. Provide a Solid Community Foundation

Form an Educational Foundation to enlist the help of parents and community members in raising funds for projects like mini-grants to teachers, scholarships to summer enrichment programs for students, and technology centers.

## K. Recognize Parking Space Needs

Provide special parking places for parents who visit the building to volunteer or meet with staff. There's nothing more frustrating to parents than having to park miles away from the building or worry about getting a parking ticket.

## L. Give Specific Written Guidelines

Publish a "what to do if you have a problem at school" booklet letting parents know the procedures to follow for solving specific problems and what to expect in the way of help. Examples of items that might be included in the booklet are: what to do if your child complains about being bullied on the playground; what to do if your child has a problem with a teacher; what to do if you object to a library book or a unit of instruction; what to do if your child refuses to attend school; what to do if your child will be absent from school for an extended period; or what to do if you family plans to take a vacation during the school year.

## M. Plan Ahead

Publish a yearly school calendar that contains information about all of the important events to take place in the year (athletic contests, musical concerts, fund-raising events, beginning and end of marking periods, etc.) Your staff (and parent leaders) will complain the first time you ask them to choose all of their dates a year in advance, but the calendar will help parents plan

ahead. Nothing makes parents madder than last minute schedule changes or flyers announcing events that go astray. This calendar can also double as the school handbook, thus ensuring that it won't get put in a drawer and be forgotten.

## N. Focus on Names

When I enrolled in my small Midwestern college, the president already knew the names of the 400 freshman students. He had pouted through admission applications, studied the pictures, and memorized the names and faces. Learn as many students' and parents' names as you can. After you've learned all of your students' names, learn something unique about each one. Ask teachers to label student desks with student's first and last names to help you when you visit classrooms. Give out name tags at all parents meetings. When you meet with a parent, hand out a personal compliment or two about their child. Nothing will bring a smile to a parent's face faster than good news about their child.

The time you invest in building strong parental relationships will pay off in increased student achievement, a positive building climate, and high student and teacher morale.

Portions of this article were adapted from *How to Deal with Parents Who Are Angry, Troubled, Afraid, or Just Plain Crazy*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1998 and *The Ten Traits of a Highly Successful School*, Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1999.

Elaine K. McEwan has been a teacher, librarian, elementary school principal, and assistant superintendent for instruction in the western suburbs of Chicago. She is the author of more than two dozen books for educators and parents. She is now a consultant offering workshops in raising reading achievement, school-community relations, and instructional leadership. She is located at 10140 N. Alder Spring Dr., Oro Valley AZ 85737.

# In 1945–What Students Needed to Know

**Introduction by the Editor**

The following three review tests were published in 1945 for use by teachers with upper elementary and intermediate (7-8th) grade students.

How would you, the reader, do on these three tests 50-some years later? And how does the content and level of the material compare with the elementary and middle school curriculum of today?

## Apply the Tests to Today's Realities

The use of these tests illustrates an exercise that district communications directors and principals might consider.

•Publish similar tests used in schools in 1999 in the district newsletter or in the local newspaper as actual test questions. These will give a clear idea of what students of today are expected to learn. Be sure to give the answers, too. Such tests can provide concrete examples of your standards in a format the average mature person, who took such tests 50-80 years ago, can understand.

Citizens are often confronted with reports from various agencies that the standards of our public schools are not as challenging as they "once were"; or should be today. Use of such tests may be one example, while only part of a total picture, for showing adults what is really going on in schools.

# REVIEW TESTS

For English and Elementary Science

## Test Your English

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# The Solar System

CLARENCE B. WASHBURN
*For Grammar Grades*

*Directions:* Fill in the blanks with the words or number from the Key List that will make the statement correct.

1. The names of the planets and star groups have come down to us from ——.
2. In the earliest days people —— at night by moonlight and the aid of the stars.
3. May people as well as —— are interested in star study.
4. All plant and animal life depend upon ——.
5. —— would be a frozen waste if it were not for the sun's heat rays.
6. The early —— worshipped the sun as a god.
7. The ancient people had no real —— as to the size of the sun.
8. —— reveals the fact that the volume of the sun is a million times greater than that of the earth.
9. The sun is a fiery-hot mass with an atmosphere having a —— of gases.
10. The atmosphere of the sun contains many —— found also upon the earth.
11. The composition of the sun's atmosphere can be ascertained by the use of a ——.
12. Some scientists estimate the —— of the sun's center to be 40,000,000 degrees, and that the sun's surface is —— but too unlike that of the earth.
13. Jupiter has a volume —— larger than the earth.
14. The so called "giant planet" has —— moons.
15. —— is the planet surrounded by rings and also has nine moons.
16. In 1781 an astronomer and musician, —— discovered Uranus.
17. The planet —— requires 165 of our earth years to complete its orbit around the sun.
18. March 13, 1930, the planet —— discovered by Dr. Percival Lowell, was announced to the world.

Word List

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. conception | 14. Saturn |
| 2. temperature | 15. nineteen |
| 3. 1300 times | 16. Earth |
| 4. elements | 17. nine |
| 5. the queen | 18. Neptune |
| 6. William Herschel | 19. traveled |
| 7. scientists | 20. energy |
| 8. stored up | 21. Mars |
| 9. Greeks | 22. Geometry |
| 10. Mercury | 23. spectroscope |
| 11. Pluto | 24. planets |
| 12. atmosphere | 25. the sun |
| 13. antiquity | |

Key

14. stored up (8)
15. Arts (24)
16. Mercury (10)
17. Saturn (1)
18. Mars (21)
19. Atmosphere (12)
20. 1300 times (3)
21. Pluto (11)
22. Earth (16)
23. Nine (17)
24. Uranus (14)
25. William Herschel (6)
26. Neptune (18)
27. Jupiter (15)

# Elementary Science

ALICE DEARBORN
*For Intermediate and Grammar Grades*

1. The body of a plane is called the fuselage, the tail section is called the ——? (empennage)
2. Name two brothers who were successful with an airplane at Kitty Hawk, N. C. (Wright brothers)
3. A stevedore is supposed to weigh no more than —— pounds. (155 pounds)
4. A person who studies the weather is called —— (meteorologist)
5. A —— measures the revolutions of the motor per minute. (tachometer)
6. Why does an airport have a control tower? (Safety—incoming planes and outgoing planes)
7. In order to fly a plane four things are necessary. They are ——, ——, ——, and —— (thrust, weight, lift, and drag)
8. Machine guns mounted on the cowl of a plane are —— with the propeller. (synchronized)
9. In a foundry where metals are mixed together, the result is called an ——? (alloy)
10. Did four U. S. Army planes ever fly around the world successfully, to prove the good of the airplane? True or false. (true)
11. Air pressure increases as you ascend. True or false. (false)
12. Name one of the most famous women fliers of all times. (Amelia Earhart) Tell what became of her. (Lost in the Pacific on her flight around the world.)



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*The American school system has, to some extent, simply happened...It has not been carefully planned. It has not been based on a study either of children on one hand or of society's needs on the other.*

Agnes E. Benedict (1942)

*Education is a wonderful thing. If you couldn't write your name, you'd have to pay cash.*

Rita Mae Brown (1988)

# A Computer Glitch Showdown at Puddlescreek

## Conflict over the district's lack of a long-range plan

by Phyllis West Johnson

Mildred Milestone was technology director for Puddlescreek School District. She had received her degree in instructional technology at State U. 10 years ago, and largely because of her efforts, the district had entered the computer age.

The high school and the junior high each had a media lab with 30 computers, one for administrative uses and several that teachers and students used. Mildred saw herself as a media facilitator. She was engaged in consulting and "showing" computer and media technology to teachers and administrators a few hours a week at each school. However, as there were eight of them, her time was stretched thin. She could use an assistant, she often thought.

The computers in the two upper level labs, unfortunately, broke down frequently, and the staff had arranged for parent and other volunteers in the community to help with technical assistance on a fairly regular basis and various problems that cropped up.

Just the other day, a student came into the junior high school media center, crying that she was going to fail science because a report she had prepared on her computer wasn't compatible with her teacher's computer. Her presentation worked at home and at her mother's office, but it did not work on any computer in the school although the software programs were the same. Milestone experienced more and more of these happenings over the past four years. Some teachers now required their students to use computers at home or sometimes at the local library. The principal even opened the high school media lab to students and parents in the evenings a few times every week. However, Mildred was concerned that teachers were straying from their mission to teach content, not technology. "They are dabbling in areas they know little about," thought Milestone.

Although many of the teachers agreed with Milestone, a number of the younger instructors believed that the district's software and hardware needed to be desperately updated. Twelve months ago, one teacher decided on a course of action. Aileen Applet taught language at the junior high, and was married to Joe, an associate professor at nearby Fairmount University. Aileen initiated meetings between Puddles-

She complained to Beth Betcher, "Sure, the media labs will run smoothly for a while, but what about a year from now? Who is going to help me when the money runs out?"

To this the superintendent replied, somewhat sarcastically, "Just get another grant."

creek's fairly new superintendent, Beth Betcher, and Joe, with the idea of developing a joint proposal for a grant for computer operations at the school system.

Now, a year later, a grant of $100,000 was a reality. Mildred was assigned to work with a team of educational technologists and programmers from Fairmount U. Funding was to provide an opportunity to update the hard- and software for the two media labs and presumably set the stage for labs at each elementary school and even, eventually, lead to a computer for each student. The Applets, both in their mid-30s, were convinced that this grant would lead to other funding and grants. Advancement in their careers might result, as well, as Sherri had her eye on the junior high principalship and Joe was up for full professor soon.

Milestone resented the fact that Ms. Applet never sought her advice before initiating grant discussions with the superintendent and Fairmount University officials. Regardless, Milestone decided to try to head off what she perceived as a disaster for the district.

She complained to Beth Betcher, "Sure, the media labs will run smoothly for a while, but what about a year from now? Who is going to help me when the money runs out?"

To this the superintendent replied, somewhat sarcastically, "Just get another grant."

Indeed, when the board about the grant proposal, Mildred was led to believe there would be funding directed toward the assessment of the district's needs, with the goal of justifying the need for a media assistant-one with technical expertise. Later, a university official said that one or two graduate assistants from FU's departments of instructional technology and computer programming would supply the necessary technical support.

As for the district technology plan, there still wasn't one! It was whatever Superintendent Betcher wanted it to be depending on whom she was trying to please-board members, university officials, or community members. She told the local reporters what she thought people wanted to hear. She said that she would update the district's media labs with or without Mildred Milestone's support. Betcher wanted to invest much of the grant money into new technology and communicated that to her constituency. She planned to target other funding sources with regards to the staffing issue.

"You'd better get with the program," Beth firmly stated to Milestone. The superintendent,barely 35, envisioned an electronic schoolhouse without walls. Not only did she want a computer for every student, but also she imagined her district as the downstate learning hub. She imagined establishing a Parent Resource Center. Guest lectures from leading parenting and child specialists could beam into the district via satellite. Parents and teachers could interact through distance learning. Parents would gather and discuss community issues-from gangs to college scholarships to gender bias in education.

But could the district support such an ambitious plan? The district was located far south in the state-100 miles from any major city. To her, the distance provided even more incentive to establish innovative links across the country. Now that the district had received $100,000 to update its media labs, Betcher was eager to turn to greener pastures, while Milestone, however, saw the money as a mere drop in the bucket. She could barely keep up with the equipment that the district had now. She had to rely on volunteer support-which wasn't always reliable. But Mildred's arguments landed on deaf ears.

The technology director was amazed at the amount of time students already wasted on the Internet-a vast sea of advertising and unverified data. Milestone, who had nearly completed her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, had recommended that time and money should be spent to update the curriculum to reflect the needs of the community. Gender and multicultural issues should be incorporated into the curriculum, she believed.

Puddlescreek, a university town, was rich in diversity and represented many cultures and economic backgrounds. Many families in the district had a computer in their home, but just as many more did not. As far as using the school's media labs during the evenings, some parents had night jobs; others had young children at home, while others lacked the time or transportation to bring their children back to school. Furthermore, volunteers typically ran the media lab in the evenings, but they often lacked the technical expertise or training to help students with their projects. Many of the computer projects were optional for students, and in many cases they offered a way for them to earn extra credit. Milestone thought that it was inherently unfair to offer such assignments, when some students had no access to a computer after school.

Beth Betcher, however, knew that she could not back down. She dismissed Milestone's arguments as overly cautious and less than visionary. Indeed a recent newspaper editorial

She imagined establishing a Parent Resource Center. Guest lectures from leading parenting and child specialists could beam into the district via satellite.

praised the superintendent for her foresight and embraced her distance learning proposal. In two days, she would meet with the Fairmount University team members, and together they would begin to sort out the details on how to proceed.

Betcher wondered whether she should even invite Milestone to the meeting. But, then again, what if Milestone was right? What if the district spent $100,000 dollars on updating media labs that only served the needs of some students? And what about technical support? Would the university team be willing to help on these matters after the grant money was spent, or would the district simply face the same problems in the next year to two?

The young superintendent had a million doubts racing through her head. She had been so confident, and now Milestone was the confident one. Betcher couldn't fail, she believed, but if she did, the press would blame her. The superintendent didn't need Milestone hanging around the district, saying, "I told you so!" Perhaps she should fire Milestone. In fact, Milestone might frighten away future investors with her pessimism, she thought.

To complicate matters, the political motivations of Ms. Applet had become obvious during the past few months. The principal at Middletown Junior High was going to retire next year, and Ms. Applet let it be known that she was very interested in the position.

Meanwhile, Mildred Milestone was making inroads of her own. To her friend on the *Daily News*, she had explained why the project was doomed to fail and why, indeed, she was qualified to assess the district's so-called technology plan (which she added was nonexistent). As she believed that her job was in jeopardy, she had also spoken to many key leaders in the community about the fiasco that the district was certain to experience. A citizen's group was being formed to rally to her cause and was going to support her at the next board meeting, which Milestone had every intention of attending.

While Beth Betcher pondered how to proceed with the project and the fate of her subordinate, Mildred Milestone was aligning unseen forces that might decide the fate of her boss.

To an observer, only time would tell whose views would prevail, and that time was just around the corner.

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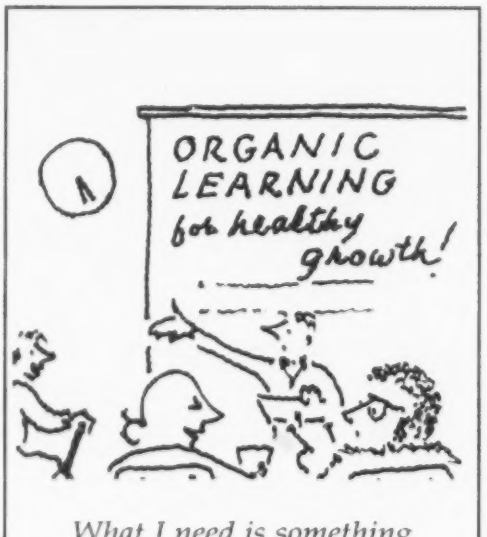


*What I need is something on pest control.*

**"Ms. Magister" by Jim Simpson, courtesy Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta, Canada**

# A Case of the Tail Wagging the Digital Dog

By Peter C. Riley

Sadly, the fictional case of Mildred Milestone is much too real. Officials in many institutions today are quickly jumping on the bandwagon to keep from "falling behind" in the educational technology race, only to find out that there is much more to the problem than originally envisioned. Getting to the leading edge is easy; staying there is a whole different story.

Leaders in institutions are often driven by the need for "bigger, better, faster and more" when it comes to technology, although many times (such as in this case) there is no plan for infrastructure or implementation. This is a very serious mistake, and can lead to a failed operation more times than not.

In this case, the problems were rooted in a number of factors:

1. It appears that a narrowly focused vision was used to establish the direction of the grant. The system was already broken, and the fixes to existing problems were not addressed. Had a planning and grant development committee been established up front with the appropriate members, infrastructure and integration could have been addressed. As it stands, the school district stands to lose much more than just a superintendent or technology director. Future grant proposals could essentially be doomed.

2. No grant funding consideration was given to the infrastructure to support the ambitious plan of the superintendent. Too often when grant proposals for instructional technology are developed, the support structure is overlooked. Technology is a powerful supplement to teaching, but without a support system, it may not function properly and could become more of a hindrance than a benefit.

3. The district does not have an established technology plan. It is never too late to implement a technology plan. Although Superintendent Betcher envisioned a utopian technology environment, it is not possible without a blueprint for construction. Vision is a wonderful thing, but vision alone cannot build an effective system without planning.

4. The CEO has failed to use the district's expertise effectively. Betcher did not consider the expertise of her technology director, nor did she try to put together a team of individuals who would provide a view of all resources necessary to implement a program of technology upgrades.

The technology director should consult the superintendent and construct a proposed technology plan and be pre-

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When considering a technology upgrade program, a number of issues must be considered besides simply purchasing "bigger, better, faster" hardware and software.

pared to present it at the next board meeting. The superintendent must immediately put together a team of people to address the issues and come up with proposed solutions. This committee should consist of the technology director, interested faculty, and a technology team from the local university. Not only can this committee help resolve the problems, but it can help to refine the technology plan for the superintendent to use as a roadmap for future programs.

This team should reassess the existing problems, consider what role the new technology will play, and what other resources are necessary to support this project.

When considering a technology upgrade program, a number of issues must be considered besides simply purchasing "bigger, better, faster" hardware and software. If a technology plan does not exist, at a minimum, the following are recommended areas of focus:

- What is the current situation? What problems exist? What are considerations for platform network topology, design, and/or configuration management?
- Is the current infrastructure adequate to support the proposed changes? If not, what else is required?
- How long will the new technology be useable? Will it meet the needs of the school and community for at least three years? If not, what are the anticipated immediate future needs?
- Is there an overall vision for the program? How does it fit into available or proposed resource requests?

No plan is perfect. However, if time is taken to properly assess the current situation, a plan can be developed to solve these types of problems.

Peter C. Riley is an assistant professor of multimedia and the new media center director at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

*I was asked this morning if I'd ever met Dickens.*

"Ms. Magister" by Jim Simpson, courtesy Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta, Canada

# How to Work with Media Reporters

## An Orientation Guide for New School Spokespeople

**By Michael Mullen**

### Introduction

People new to the realities of the news media include newly appointed superintendents, school PR directors, and board presidents. These folks soon learn that one of their responsibilities is serving as a spokesperson for the district. Mike Mullen gives tips to orient people to their new role.

**Like it or not**, local school officials have contact with the media on a regular basis for a wide variety of reasons–to clarify decisions, to comment of programs and personnel, or, in some cases, to participate on news shows. Yet despite all this firsthand experience–or perhaps because of it–officials seem to have an inherent fear of the news media. The truth is, that by working effectively with the media, officials can make their jobs easier by accurately informing and educating the citizens.

### The Media Myth–Reporters Should Be Feared

The fear of the news media is easily justified when one sees, on television news programs, hordes of camera-carrying folks chasing people and cars down the street. Such scenes appear frightening and make imagining a reasonable, working relationship with the news media appear difficult at best. The adversarial relationship between officials and the news media has its roots all the way back to Watergate when two ordinary beat reporters uncovered a story that brought down a presidency.

Flashback to Boston in 1976. Robert W. Greene describes the scene in his foreword to *The Reporter's Handbook*, "Some 600 college students have elbowed their way into a small auditorium on a rainy Friday night to hear a panel discussion on investigative reporting. One of the panelists asks how many of the students intend to become investigative reporters. More than 300 raise their hands."

It appeared to these students that

there had to be more governmental "sources" out there just waiting to tell all the deep and dirty secrets of their agency to an eager reporter. There were governors and senators to be "outed," maybe another president, who knew? It wasn't that hard–find two confidential sources who agreed with each other and away you went. The power of the press flexes it muscle once again.

Not quite.

## The Media Truth–Journalism Is Not a Profession

Many journalists will admit that journalism is not a profession–there is no universally agreed-upon and universally practiced set of ethics or code of conduct related to gathering news; journalism has no built-in mechanism to police its ranks; there is no agreed-upon set of entrance requirements needed, nor is there any basic body of knowledge to master before plunging into the field–and because of the first amendment, this is extremely unlikely to change.

But there is another, more fundamental reason why journalism is unlike traditional professions–such as law or engineering. In those professions, a student learns a great deal of knowledge and comparatively little technique, then sallies forth to practice. In a typical journalism school, the student learns a great deal of technique and very little about how things work–or how to find out how things work.

Typical journalists, like those you normally deal with, most likely never took a political science course in college or graduate school to understand how government works on the community, county, state or federal level. They never learned how and why services are provided–let alone how to evaluate the performance of a single agency.

Most reporters never have taken an economics course to understand how a local economy works or an education course to understand how to evaluate the local school system and how it spends its money.

Instead, journalists spend their time in college practicing how to ask questions and learning how to arrange the answers in an understandable format–who, what, where, when, and why. And while all reporters can answer these questions, the really great ones know how things work so they can ask the **right** questions–and get the **real** answers.

## Media Relations Can Be Positive

Before going any further, you must be ready to accept the fact that a good working relationship with the news media is not only possible, but extremely beneficial for the community. Such relationships are already taking place with newspaper, radio and television reporters all across the country. And while the fear discussed earlier is natural, it is unnecessary. The fact is, if you work for the public, questions from reporters are unavoidable.

If people work in government long enough, they will someday face questions from a news reporter. These questions can be as simple as wanting to know when the next board meeting will be held, or as complicated as explaining why the tax levy is important.

The majority of questions probably are asked over the telephone. A simple inquiry, such as a meeting time or an explanation of a new policy, can be effectively handled through a phone

conversation. Reporters usually understand the time constraints of elected officials' busy schedules. Often the phone is the most efficient way to deal with many question for both parties.

But officials who feel more comfortable meeting in person should say so, keeping in mind that the reporter may be near a deadline making a face-to-face meeting impossible. And of course, more complicated matters, such as tax increment financing, might be best handled with an appointment in person.

## Accuracy Is Necessary

A fine relationship with the media carries with it countless benefits, not the most important of which is the fair and accurate discussion of organizational issues. It's obvious that the most efficient way to share and explain such issues to the public is through some form of media that is able to reach a large audience.

Often, when an issue is controversial, the tendency might be to limit public discussion. While at first glance this might seem wise, the approach usually backfires. The best plans are the ones that can survive the scrutiny of public view and debate. An accurate report of an issue provides people with the facts that will allow all sides to make the right decision. No one will disagree that this approach benefits everyone.

Informing the public is more than a moral obligation, it is also a legal one. Laws require the advertising of meetings, ordinances, budgets, and other governmental actions. The laws also require that most data in the possession of local government be open and available for public inspection.

It is the responsibility of the official in charge of the requested information to know what is classified as public information and what is not. Most requests for information come from the general public and not from the news media. While the news media has no more legal right to the information than anyone else, its members are often more versed in sunshine laws. Sometimes disagreements over interpretations of the law lead to legal fights, which benefits neither the organization nor the media.

## Make Reporters' Jobs Easier

The best way to develop a working relationship with the media is to be an accurate source. This does not mean that you must tell reporters everything you know. Nor does it mean that you must answer every question they ask. It simply means that the easier you make their job, the more likely they are to come to you again and again for information, quotes, and your opinion on issues. And every time you speak to the media, it's an opportunity to communicate your message on whatever the issue of the day happens to be.

To be considered a fine source, you must know your subject thoroughly and speak about it with confidence. This comes easily if you have prepared by anticipating the most difficult questions and practiced answering them in a calm, knowledgeable manner. The best way to approach this includes several easy-to-follow steps.

### A. Identify Three Messages

Every time you or someone else from your organization talks to a reporter is an opportunity to promote your school system and its message. Seize the

# A Bill of Rights for Interviewers & Interviewees

Both interviewers and those being interviewed have rights and the right to expect things from each other. More than 20 years ago, John Jamison, then director of corporate communications for the North Carolina Bank, developed this Interview Bill of Rights as a guide for the reporter and the subject:

## Rights of The Interviewee

**Those Being Interviewed Have The Right To:**

•An objective listening to the facts presented

•An accurate representation of his or her position

•A fair and balanced context for all statements

•Know in advance the general area of questioning and to have reasonable time for preparation

•Reasonable flexibility as to when to have the interview–just as there are times when a reporter cannot be interrupted near a deadline, there are times when others cannot be interrupted

•Expect the interviewer to have done some homework

•Withhold comment when there is good reason without having this translated as evading or "stonewalling"–for example, information that could damage regarding matters in litigation or negotiation or information that could damage innocent persons

•An assumption of innocence until guilt is proven

•Offer feedback to the reporter, especially to call attention to instances in which the story, in the honest opinion of the interviewee, missed the point or was in error–and to have this feedback received in good faith

•Appropriate correction of substantial errors without further damage to the credibility or reputation of the interviewee's organization.

## Rights of The Interviewer

**Those Conducting The Interview Have The Right To:**

•Access to an authoritative source of info on a timely basis

•Candor, within the limit of propriety

•Access to information and assistance on adverse stories as well as favorable ones

•Protection on a story the reporter has developed exclusively, until it has been published or until another reporter asks independently for the same information

•Not be used by business for "free-advertising" on a purely commercial story

•Not be reminded that advertising pays the reporter's salary

•Not be held accountable for ill treatment by another reporter or another medium at another time

•Publish a story without showing it to the interviewee in advance

•Not be asked to suppress legitimate news purely on the grounds that it would be embarrassing or damaging

•Not be summoned to a news conference when a simple phone call, written statement, news release or interview would do just as well.

opportunity and take advantage of it–don't waste it by just answering the reporter's questions without getting your points across. Unfortunately, many boards or CEOs haven't developed an overall message. If yours hasn't, do it as soon as possible, it is that important.

The first thing to do is to define three facts, issues or messages you want everyone to know about your school. These are the messages you will use when dealing with the media. If you are unsure of what messages you want to promote, think of how the various "issues of the day" affect the citizens of your district. Identify your vulnerabilities and brainstorm with others. Keep asking "why," "so what," and "prove it" until you have three solid points.

Once you define the three messages, write them out in sentence form, and work with the wording until you have three sentences you can commit to memory that correspond to the three messages you wish to promote. Then relate these messages to people's everyday lives by developing examples, anecdotes, analogies, and stories to illustrate each positive point.

### B. Anticipate The Questions

Good sources anticipate a reporter's questions and are ready to answer knowledgeably. Make a list of questions you have been or could be asked. Make sure some are ones you always get, some are those you would like to get, and some are the worst question you can think of–that is, the ones you never want to get. Then practice answering them, making sure you always work your way back to your three positive points.

Good sources are also always up-to-date and know as much as possible that is relevant to the interview topic (and how it affects your school). Regardless of how well you prepare for the interview or anticipate the questions, however, you will eventually be faced with a question to which you don't know the answer. But there are ways to deal with that as well.

### C. Remember the Ten Cs

In short, to be a good source, every time you speak with a reporter, consider the ten Cs–always be concise, candid, conversational, clear, correct, calm, compassionate, compelling, complete, and credible. And remember to personalize your responses as much as possible by using "you" and "we."

The best way to be all of these is to develop what is known as your "Media Mind." It is a file box of index cards you keep inside your head. You fill it with the three messages you have prepared to promote your organization and any stories or facts or figures you may need depending on what the reporter wants to talk about–and only those things. Sometimes it helps by actually writing the information on index cards and reviewing them during your preparation.

During the interview, no matter what the questions, refer to the internal index file for an answer to the reporter's question. Never, under any circumstances, allow the reporter to guide you away from the original topic of the interview for which you prepared. If you search your memory and cannot find an index card with the answer (in other words, you were not prepared for that question or topic), then you have no specific answer to give.

In this case, tell the reporter you thought the interview was about a spe-

cific issue and you are ready to discuss that issue.

If you are asked for specific information you do not have, do not be embarrassed to say you do not have it. Merely explain to the reporter that you want to be sure you only give out accurate information, so you will have to check and get back to the reporter.

## You Have Rights and Responsibilities

As a source, you and the reporter have the right to expect a few things from each other. In short, the reporter has an obligation to be accurate, fair and balanced. When any of those standards aren't met, you should call the reporter and express your concerns. In most cases, the matter should be settled with that first call. If not, do not hesitate to contact the reporter's editor.

Sources have a right to know what story a reporter is working on. They also have a right to know that what they say will be published or broadcast. It's best to assume that all parts of an interview and every word you say are "on the record." That means any and/or parts of your comments will appear in print or on the air. "Off the record" discussions are rare. Please don't ask reporters to provide advanced copies of stories for you to review; almost none of them will (and shouldn't). They will (and should), however, call back to verify quotes and-or double check facts.

## There Is Nothing to Fear But...

With preparation and practice, a fine working relationship with the news media does not have to be an intimidating experience–the more comfortable you become, the better you will be at communicating your message to the public. Consider every media contact an opportunity to share and explain your important messages.

Mike Mullen, director of communications for the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, edits the *Pennsylvanian* magazine for state municipal associations (2941 N. Front St., Harrisburg, PA 17103). His article, published in the *Pennsylvanian*, dealt with municipal officers and staff members. The text has been modified to apply to school districts.

*With the same slow minds in charge.*

"Ms. Magister" by Jim Simpson, courtesy Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta, Canada



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*The content of the curriculum should never exclude the realities of students...when students study all worlds except their own, they are miseducated.*

*Johnnetta B. Cole (1993)*

# Education's Image in the New Millennium: One Debacle to Overcome

by David Alan Gilman

As the dawn of the 21st Century approaches, each of us must ask what can be done to improve the nation's public school enterprise and the public's perception of it. Although it is a custom to formulate **New Year's** resolutions, we are the few fortunate persons in history who can make a **New Millennium** resolution.

In the year 1999 and previously, one debacle that has contributed to the demise of respect for America's schools stands head and shoulders above the rest. It is the inordinate fixation about and the abuse of one of the perennial bad guys in education: the standardized norm referenced test. Numbers, as in test score results, are challenging learning as the primary enterprise of American schools.

## What is the problem and what is the solution?

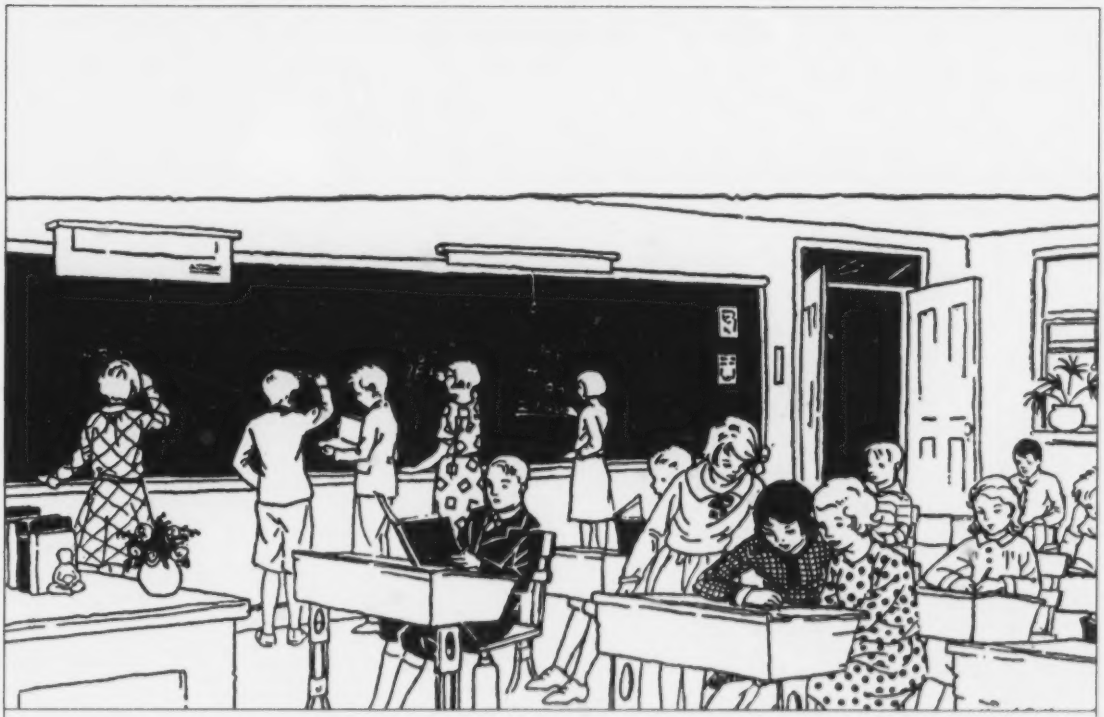
A blatant dichotomy persists among groups of people who critique America's schools.

At one end of a spectrum are those who view schools, teachers, and students as the **problem**. Those who believe this, and among them are state legislators, have insisted on increased accountability and dedicated programs. If schools are to receive more money from taxpayers, legislators insist, there must be standards and controls over the quality of what the schools accomplish. This accountability has been translated into a concentrated effort to increase the scores on so-called standardized tests. These people believe—incorrectly I contend—that scores on such test are tangible and "comprehensive" indicators of the effectiveness of a school.

At the other end are those who believe that the schools, the teachers, and the students are the **solution**. Advocates of this position include various special interest groups, each of which seeks to compel educational institutions to add more and more programs to the schools, including tasks that were traditionally the purview of a child's parents, as well as the introduction of schooling that is best described as teaching "political correctness."

The trouble is that these positions are mutually incompatible.

In 1982, Caroline Warner, then state superintendent of schools in Arizona, compiled a list of 150 "Things Schools Are Expected to Do." Fifteen years later, a new list titled "Son of Things Schools Were Expected to Do" appeared in



*Contemporary Education*[8] (and was reprinted in the *Journal of Educational Relations*[9]). The 1997 list contained over twice as many school responsibilities as the 1982 list. In both lists, the last competency mentioned is "teach reading, writing and computing."

Since then and as a result of the violent episodes that have occurred in schools in recent years, the list has increased to include metal detection and simulated lock-downs, as well as many other requirements to promote safety. No doubt, the list of what educators are expected to do will again be increased, and it is unlikely that anything will be deleted from the list.

Members of society require its public education systems to perform more and more tasks and increase its responsibilities without eliminating any of the previous ones. However, the ability of educators to perform any one of these tasks well will probably be diminished. The incompatibility of these two positions regarding schooling has led to a crisis in public relations for the entire national educational school system and for individual schools as well.

## Can Tests Solve All Concerns?

Legislatures have searched for one or more panaceas related to the first of these positions so that they solve schooling problems. In their desperate effort to justify continued funding for schools or increasing it and to improve the image of schools, it seemed logical, legislators said, that the state-wide testing of student achievement would be appropriate and necessary. Today, most states, through their state departments of education, use state-wide testing to:

- Evaluate schools.
- Identify students in need of remediation.
- Serve as a basis for standards.
- Stratify students into ability levels.
- Evaluate teacher, administrator, and school competence.

So important have test scores become that during recent times, the following events have occurred in Indiana:

- At a trial over the use of testing in Indiana, claims were made that state-wide testing of second graders would

reduce the prison population, bring industry to the state, improve scores on the Graduate Record Examination, and prevent yet another generation of Indiana students from "being lost." [12]

- In 1999, every one of the 20 applications for professional development school funding grants for funding to introduce school reform had as its central focus the increase of state-wide test scores.[15]
- Test items on poetry interpretation and politically correct behavior were cited as necessary because they would improve the job qualifications of students.[12]
- A regional inservice education program was billed as a program that would improve state-wide test scores. The meeting drew 600 paid participants, who were the victims of bait and switch, because the program content was reading comprehension instruction.[5]
- Real estate advertisements of homes for sale in the Indianapolis newspapers often contain information such as the number of bedrooms, bathrooms, features of the home, and a statement about the state-wide test scores of the school in the home's attendance district.[13]
- Educators who attended a conference to redesign the teacher education program had as their first and primary consideration: "State test scores will go up."[4]
- State legislators have publicly embraced the state's competency-based graduation requirements, even though the projected failure rate turned out as anticipated: 40-60 percent of tenth graders did not pass as a result of the first administration of the test, and as of this writing, 22 percent of high school seniors will not be allowed to receive a diploma. Indeed, some legislators have called for raising the minimum standards from ninth grade proficiency to twelfth grade proficiency. This change, of course, would result in a much smaller proportion of students who would graduate.[6]

However, during recent interviews and conversations with numerous educators, I have found them to believe the side effects of both state-wide testing and competency-based graduation requirements to be largely detrimental. Their opinions have often caused them to say to me, "If we could, [the tests] would be gone tomorrow." It is a paradox that educators place so much of their efforts on improving the results of something they would rather do without. The effect of mandatory testing has been to create not what was foretold, but rather to create a public relations monstrosity for local schools, school systems, administrators, and indeed state educational systems.[16]

This devastation has been so severe that at one educational conference, a representative for one of the universities who attended predicted that "if the state requires a subjectively scored test that is tied to high school graduation and 40-60 percent of students fail it, this could be the end of public education in this state."[12]

It may not be a coincidence that Florida, the first state that championed competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation, is the first state to initiate a state-wide voucher system.[17] Low test scores coupled with escalating per student expenditures contribute to a loss of confidence in the education profession and in the state's schools and thus open the door for state-wide voucher initiatives.

## What's Wrong With State-Wide Testing

There are many problems with state-wide testing.

First, the tests were designed to identify students in need of remediation, but they are now being used to evaluate schools, teachers, and administrators.

Second, the existence of competition involving test scores has condoned a phenomenon of cheating by teachers, administrators, and students.[1] Although it is rarely discussed, and nobody wants to talk about it, cheating on state-wide tests is both prevalent and egregious.[2] In one school, for some obscure reason, test scores were analyzed for only 11 third graders, and all of them scored in the 99th percentile of the nation. (The chances of this occurring naturally are infinitesimal.) In another school district, it was ascertained that one middle school's students scored higher than those in the other five, but it was then discovered that only 75 percent of the students enrolled in the high-scoring school took part in the testing. School officials have developed nefarious schemes to prevent the test scores of students known to be low achievers from ever being recorded.[16]

Third, state-wide tests have produced stress that contributes to educator burnout. And it doesn't stop there. Questionable testing practices have developed in response to the need for the accountability that the tests produce. Many of the test questions have no correct answer, and students are expected to explain the steps they go through in solving the problem. It is the ultimate irony that responses in which a student explains how an incorrect answer was obtained may be awarded a higher score than is awarded to a correct answer without a good explanation. Inappropriate statistical procedures are used for test interpretation. Innovative procedures are used to establish a quasi reliability to make the

tests appear to be accurate. As the testing companies push the marketing of new forms of testing to create a need for a new product, the weaknesses of new testing forms previously unexplored are becoming readily apparent.[10] And, students have actually been bribed to increase their test score performance.[16]

State-wide performance testing does not fare any better. Students who develop writer's block during the examination period do not perform well on the so-called performance tests that measure a student's ability to write to a prompt. Students who have learned to solve math problems intuitively and international students do not score highly on test items that require them to explain the solution to their answer. It continues to be a mystery why performance tests award more points for students who get wrong answers but explain the process well than they award to students who have correct answers with inadequate explanations of the process that yielded them a correct response.

## Remediation Is Not the Answer

One outcome of all of this state-wide testing is that some students are selected for remediation because of their low test scores. The simple truth is that remediation is a process that educators know very little about. Although there are a few notable remedial reading programs in schools today that are claimed to be successful, most universities do not teach remediation to their education majors. Also, there is very little literature that deals with remediation, and remediation is generally



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believed to be ineffective in producing the desired outcomes.[1] Even if a university does offer classes in remedial instruction, these classes are neither required nor popular, and enrollment in them is very small. Not much is known about how remediation is accomplished other than to have the staff present the same old soup, warmed over, in the hope that it will take the second or the third time. However, there are many reasons as to why many students may score higher on subsequent testings, only one of which has anything to do with the success of the remediation. Educators have much to learn about remediation before it can be considered to be a solution to the problems failing students face.

## Remediation Leads to Its Own Problems

After students are selected for remediation, they then go to special classes away from their friends. Because of this, they are not only identified and labeled as incompetent, but they also must engage themselves in dull and repetitious remedial instruction that has been variously characterized as drill and practice, drill and skill, or "drill and kill." Some students may be required to receive as many as 11 years of remediation.[1] Typically, remediation is not designed to address the learning difficulties that students are experiencing but rather is a broad-based attempt to increase their test scores by providing instruction in every area that the test covers. When asked, the same educators *who say they would eliminate statewide testing if they could* readily admit that the goal of remedial programs is not to improve the child's education or their mastery of the basic skills. Rather, remediation is primarily intended to improve students' test scores.

The public relations problems that many school officials face today are focused on test scores. This information is so readily available that sometimes the school administrators first learn about their schools' performances as reported by the state department of education by reading about them in their local newspaper. One middle school in our city has traditionally been stigmatized as having the lowest achievement scores in the school district. Information about this has created a media frenzy and engendered invidious comparisons with the higher scoring school in which a very few students actually took the test. However, because of its outstanding work with students in a poverty area, the first school was recognized as one of the 14 "most productive schools in the state." It was very difficult to motivate the school's teachers and administrators to publicize that recognition because of the school's stereotypical position. Furthermore, local newspaper editors seemed to be reluctant to publish information about this recognition because they themselves had become prejudiced by the school's past achievement scores.

Conversely, in another school district, questionable practices in administration of the state test were not challenged because the school district was considered to be noted for high achievement.

The emphasis on reporting test score results as the standard by which a school's performance is characterized has produced a climate that obscures all of the excellent things that schools are

doing. This further creates an atmosphere in which those who believe that schools are the problem draw attention to their position in the ranking. Those who consider that schools are the solution wonder what has gone wrong to cloud the public's perception of the fine job and hard work that American education is accomplishing.

## A Modest Proposal—Go Beyond Test Scores

A good first step to restoring confidence in American schools is to somehow, move beyond the fixation on test scores. It remains to be seen whether educators will attempt to describe their worth in terms of numbers or changes in numbers. Some teachers and administrators have already adopted an attitude of "this, too, will pass."

In the documentary on American education, "Common Miracles," produced by ABC and narrated by Peter Jennings, one educator states, "We have to find ways to teach the good stuff to everyone." That phrase seems so logical that I can't get it out of my mind, particularly since I have seen it in action. This is the strategy that was followed in a multi-categorical special education classroom that I observed at Evansville North High School. I went there to observe a student teacher, Stand Duncan, in the classroom of Patricia Day-Kuhlman. I had expected to see the typical remediation-based drill. Instead, the students were having a very spirited discussion about the differences between drama and literature...a discussion that would equal that in a university classroom.

In an 18-month period from between 1976 and 1978, in what has been described as the strongest grass roots movement in American history, 39 state legislatures passed legislation to require students to pass tests in order to graduate or to be promoted. Among the pioneers in this endeavor were Florida, California, Virginia, and Oregon.[7] Although few states have initiated similar new requirements since that time, most of the states that originated state-wide testing programs have not wavered in their use of them. An exception is Arizona, whose legislature decided to discontinue its state-wide testing for a time since the scoring of performance tests could not withstand the scrutiny necessary for it to serve as a high school graduation requirement.[1]

The outcome of this has been to stratify children into "haves, have-somes, and have-nots," and to prescribe for the have-nots a program of drill that is uninteresting, degrading, and humiliating. Educators have increased their roles as gatekeepers and have become so over-zealous in that regard that a massive teach-to-the-test response is diverting efforts at improving schools, teacher education, and public opinion.[2]

Time will tell whether public relations efforts on behalf of our public schools can move beyond current attempts to #1, drill and remediate and #2, equate the statistics of state-wide test scores to all of the things educators are supposed to accomplish with their students.

### Three possible solutions.

In the meantime, I suggest these possible solutions as we begin the New Millennium:

1. School officials and members of

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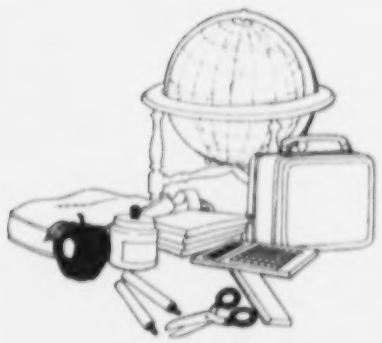


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the media corps would do well to resolve to swear off the current immature infatuation with test scores as an end-all. Tests were never intended to be "the" main indicator of the overall quality of education children receive.

2. Boards, administrators and even teachers need to initiate efforts to enlighten all citizens to the solid accomplishments—the "good stuff" the Peter Jennings' show referred to—of public schools and their staffs.

3. Our publics, including news media members, need to be given information so they can realize that testing is only one part of the teaching-learning process.

For public education to be successful in the 21st Century, educators must agree that "making the public *aware*" is a top priority.

David Alan Gilman is professor of education at Indiana State University (1015 School of Education, Terre Haute, IN 47809-1901).

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## Editor's Note:

For comments of the *Journal* editor about what a school CEO will have to do to implement Gilman's three proposed solutions, see Editor's Notes, inside front cover of this issue.

# Guidelines for Submission

## *Relations*—The Journal of Educational Relations

A refereed journal--scholarly articles by academic/higher education authorities are refereed by an international editorial review board. The *Journal* also accepts articles by practitioners and administrators in basic (K-12) education and journalists at large.

## Scope

Articles are sought on topics such as internal communication and climate, employee motivation, parent involvement, partnerships, working with the news media, community participation, audits, surveying and polls, community service programs for students, communication training, advisory committees, volunteers, writing and speaking, publications, alumni associations, foundations, mentoring, photography, and related topics.

The overall goal of the *Journal* is to support efforts to enhance/foster student achievement and staff productivity, and to provide information to build public knowledge of the value and potential benefits of a sound basic education of our youth. We advocate the concept that the school public relations function must be based on fact and reality as compared to ideals and goals of educators and the community at large.

## Style

Scholarly articles can be prepared following style guidelines of the publication manual of the American Psychological Association, **with these exceptions:**

1. **Do not** place last names of authors being cited and the year *within* the text. Number citations sequentially in the text; provide usual citations in **references following the article.**

2. Before the start of the article, include a summary of the scope and major findings of the article in one paragraph.

We encourage you to include photographs, drawings, and tables as appropriate.

## Submissions

- Submit four copies of a manuscript with a letter from the author(s).
- Articles should be 1,000 to 3,500 words in length.
- If produced on a computer, supply a disk, clearly labeled, in ASCII format, IBM format only, with the text copies.
- Include an abstract of the article and a two-three sentence credit for each author on a separate sheet.
- Advise if the article has been published or is being considered elsewhere.
- Queries for articles on specific topics are welcomed.
- SASE. Include a #10 self-addressed, stamped envelope for acknowledgement of receipt of your article. Include a 9" x 12" similar envelope for reply to submissions or queries.
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**Address manuscripts and correspondence to Albert E. Holliday, Editor and Publisher, *Journal of Educational Relations*, 1830 Walnut St., Camp Hill, PA 17011. 717-761-6620.**

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## Teachers Make a Great Impression by Being #2

# Public Relations Starts with Good Personal Relations

*by Peter Boespflug*

You never have a second chance to make a great first impression. So, when you greet parents during your school's Open House and explain in the 12 minutes allotted what you'll be teaching their children this semester, why not take the time to do it right and make a good, lasting impression, one of professionalism and caring. It might look and sound something like this:

- Sporting an "I'm #2" button on your suit coat lapel or blouse, you greet each parent of guardian at the door and hand them a small, folded twice, letter-size brochure. The pamphlet describes curriculum goals for the class, offers tips on how parents (including the "grand" model) can help students learn, describes your background and education, and adds something personal—family, pets, hobbies, community activities. It also tells how and when parents can reach you.
- They're curious about your button. Several even ask, "What's that mean?" You wait until they're all seated and explain: "Many of you asked what my button means. It's a reminder that I'm only the second most important person in your child's education. ''..'re #1. You're your child's first teacher, and unless we work as partners, I may fall short of accomplishing the academic goals for students this semester.
- You describe how you intend to communicate their children's' progress, i.e., call, write and/or e-mail them at least once every two weeks and "not just when your child does something wrong." Tell/ask for what you expect from parents in return, i.e., you'll send home an envelope containing student's work each Friday for parents to review, sign, and to be returned on Monday; you share tips on homework, studying and include booklets on the topics.

Beginning of shared accountability for meeting higher academic standards? You bet! And if you should erect at the front of your classroom, just for that one Open House night, a portable screen displaying your academic awards, diplomas, and citations (much like you see framed on the walls of doctors, lawyers and other professionals' offices), would you not be communicating to the taxpayers that you, too, are a trained professional?

Peter Boespflug is president of the American Federation of Teachers Communications Association.

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# The Journal of Educational RELATIONS

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Promoting student achievement through positive school-home-community relationships Vol. 20 No. 4, 4th Quarter 1999

## Guest Editors Are Welcome

Most of this issue's content has been coordinated by Ted Kowolski of Ball State University. Our 2nd quarter issue was mostly the work of students at Rowan University of Glassboro, New Jersey.

We encourage college professors, and other for that matter, to consider serving as guest editors. This affords them an opportunity to focus on their priority issues, and to also focus on the special strengths of a university.

We can accept individual editor involvement. We can also accept the sponsorship of an edition by a college or university, with most content prepared by staff at that institution.

We do have guidelines, available on request.

## Change in Audience Focus Underway

We have always had a major interest in content about communications, school-community relations and human relations. Our audience, I believed, was communication specialists and school administrators.

However, an additional focus starting in 2000 will be toward school administrators who have not as yet initiated vigorous communications programs, and toward professors and deans of colleges of education who as yet do not stress, as a major priority, communication and school-community relations content in preparation of school administrators and teachers. (We will continue to include content for educators generally and communications specialists.)

Far too many educators, and college professors, have taken public education for granted too long.

One result has been the recent emergence of "alternatives" that various special interest groups advocate. These include for-profit schools and vouchers or "scholarships" that would allow public funds to be used in parochial and private schools at the expense of public education.

We think that the greatest need is for a majority of public school administrators to dedicate themselves to genuine two-way communications and involvement with their many audiences. And college deans need to reconsider their required content in this crucial area.

We will include an audience-interest statement for each article, and ask that readers refer content to these two "new" audiences where it will do the most good.

Let's welcome each other to the new millennium in the spirit of excellent communication and good cheer for challenges ahead.

Albert E. Holliday
Editor-Publisher

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Cover photo:

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RELATIONS-The Journal of Educational Relations—ISSN 0741-3653
Editor-in-chief: Albert E. Holliday • Associate Editor: Joan M. Holliday
Book reviews: Arthur W. Steller

The Journal of Educational Relations is published quarterly by the Educational Communication Center, Box 657, Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657. Telephone 717-761-6620.
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**Subscriptions:** Individual rate, $48 per year. Single copy, $15.
Library rate, $60 per year. Single copy, $20.
Add $4 for subscriptions outside of the United States.
Payment in U.S. funds.

Periodicals postage paid at Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657.
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# Notes from the Guest Editor

By Theodore J. Kowalski

Ideally, public schools are supposed to function at the center of community life. This goal emanates from both the value of liberty through local control and the realization that education is most effective when it adequately addresses the needs and wants of local citizens.

In the real world, however, schools and districts differ considerably with respect to being responsive to changing conditions. Although many factors may contribute to this variance, the quality of relationships between the people who operate schools and the community is probably the most influential variable.

Commonly, school districts are labeled on the basis of geographic location. Urban, suburban, smaller city/town, and rural are the most widely used classifications. In each category, aspects of community life are different because of the configurations of property and life styles. For instance, urban residents usually work in the cities where they live; the opposite is true of suburbanites. Due to these demographic differences, our understanding of school-community relations is enhanced when we examine circumstances in relation to educational programming in each setting.

This issue of the *Journal* is devoted to looking at communication programs in several suburban school districts. Particularly when compared to neighboring urban systems, these organizations usually have certain advantages. Examples include a high level of commitment to education, growing property values, a willingness to pay higher taxes to support schools, and higher salaries and better working conditions. But while suburban districts share several characteristics that set them apart from the other geographic groups, they certainly are not all alike. Among suburban districts, there are also considerable differences that may relate to size, history (some are more than 50 years old), growth patterns (rapid growth versus declining enrollment), and diversity (e.g., race, economics).

Two of the articles in this issue describe the scope and operations of communication programs in suburban school districts. The Plano Independent School District is very large and located in the Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas, metropolitan area; it includes both elementary and secondary schools and continues to grow rapidly. By contrast, Maine Township High School District in suburban Chicago includes only high schools. This district serves multiple communities, and while stable in enrollment, it is becoming increasingly diverse ethnically. A third article concerns how officials in the Rock Hill School District 3 have repeatedly managed to pass bond referenda for new schools required by population growth. Although in the state of South Carolina, Rock Hill is a suburb of Charlotte, North Carolina.

The final article in this issue relates to a topic that has become central to many suburban districts—student community service. This concept, while not new, is highly relevant to concerns about a declining sense of citizenship and community life in American society. A voluntary, curriculum-based approach to student community service is described and advocated.

I thank the authors for their contributions and Albert Holliday for allowing me the privilege to serve as guest editor. The *Journal of Educational Relations* continues to inform scholars and practitioners of the vital role of communications in democratic schools, and it is an honor to be associated with this fine publication.

Theodore J. Kowalski is professor in the department of educational leadership at Ball State University (Muncie, Indiana 47306-0590, 765-285-8488). A former superintendent, he was dean of the Teachers College at Ball State for 10 years. He is the author of 11 books; *Keepers of the Flame* (1995) is a study of 17 urban school superintendents. He is editor of *Public Relations in Educational Organizations*, Merrill/Prentice Hall; the 2nd edition was published in 1999. He serves on the *Journal*'s editorial board.

# Maine Township #207 Serves Diverse Audiences

by Elizabeth Paine

In most Illinois public schools, public education is delivered through separate elementary and secondary districts. Thus, property owners and parents must relate to two school systems (elementary and secondary) regarding their taxes and public education of their children.

Maine Township High School District #207 is in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. The district serves nine separate communities, and its students come from four elementary school districts plus several parochial schools.

The focus of this article is on the district's Communication program, which is an integral part of 207's administrative structure.

The Communication program has been designed to develop and use information effectively within a changing organizational setting. The staff informs the public about the accomplishments of students, faculty and other employees; attempts to dispel erroneous perceptions about educational effectiveness; and accumulates and analyzes data about community needs and wants. Program scope is discussed regarding philosophy, key messages and external and internal processes.

Maine Township High School District 207 Staff Newsletter

Colleagues

winter 1999

TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES: A WORK IN PROGRESS

## Communication Program Philosophy

The complete mission statement of District 207 has been summarized by the superintendent: "Our mission is to improve learning." In this vein, the Communication staff supports effective administration by developing two-way channels for the exchange of information. This includes preparing and dis-

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seminating information about the schools, creating opportunities for dialog, listening carefully to opinions and concerns, helping administrators to communicate effectively, and providing communication-based data for decision making.

The value of these functions has increased recently due to unstable conditions in both education and the communities served. Examples of these changing conditions for District 207 include shrinking tax support, growing racial diversity, and new educational standards. These circumstances unavoidably create new responsibilities for the Communications staff.

## Three Variables Provide PR Foundation

Beliefs driving public relations in District 207 are best illustrated through three variables.

The first is *balance*. Our challenge is to:

- Provide services evenly to three "equal but different" high schools;
- Equalize coverage across elements of the curriculum (e.g., fine arts program, science and English curricular projects, applied arts and technology curricula, and internships and other school-to-work programs all receive the same level of coverage from a public relations standpoint);
- Divide coverage between students and district employees.

*Integration* is the second. This means that the Communications program is not isolated from the educational process. The tone of all district communications, whether written or oral, is non-institutional, bringing the people and programs in District 207 to life for its publics. Educational issues and stories are often presented with the parent/taxpayer perspective in mind. The intent is to illustrate that the staffs of the high schools are connected to and involved with their nine communities. This connection is reinforced through two-way dialog opportunities that occur with community-based groups, such as parent advisory groups, quarterly municipal leaders meetings, and a senior citizen advisory council.

*Identity* is the third. Using an approach common among businesses, all district documents have a strong visual identity created by a school district logo and consistent visual themes. Internal communications focus on activities and documents designed to reinforce a strong connected culture across all three campuses–a culture that values collegiality and collaboration over competition.

## Focus Is on Five Key Messages

Central to any public relations effort are key messages and mechanisms for delivering and receiving information. These program elements not only determine the extent to which public relations goals are achieved, they also contribute to the overall effectiveness of administration in the school system. While messages and strategies obviously need to vary from district to district, many of them are relevant to most public schools.

We in District 207 have five key messages to convey to external and internal audiences:

1. *The mission is to improve learning for all students by providing quality education and positive youth development.* Improved learning is the ultimate goal in every department, in every school, every day via innovative, engaging

instruction and programs.

*2. District 207 continues to be a recognized, commended, and innovative school district.* Every school earns distinctions each year that the staff works hard to publicize. During the 1999-2000 school year, for example, Maine East High School was ranked with only 25 other schools nationwide as "a school of character." Maine South High School had a state championship Rube Goldburg team, and the school's Constitution Team received personal congratulations from First Lady Hillary Clinton for achieving first place in a national competition. *U.S. News and World Report* identified the third high school, Maine West, as "one of America's most outstanding high schools in the United States."

3. *Diversity brings wealth to the district.* A richness of cultures, ideas, and opportunities—including an increased awareness and appreciation for others—is crucial to an interconnected global community. Maine is now educating Americans who have cultural ties to some 100 nations throughout the world.

4. *School pride is soaring.* Each of the district's three schools is improving by virtue of character education programs. There is increased internal collaboration of staff within buildings, among buildings and with colleagues outside the district.

5. *The district is fiscally responsible and innovative.* This reality is brought to taxpayers' and employees' attention at every opportunity. One example is the effort and time expended on writing the competitive grants that earn major dollars. These funds provide opportunities for professional development and improved student learning. For example, in 1999, the district received two federally funded Technology Literacy Challenge grants for a combined amount of $360,000, and a GOALS 2000 federal grant—to be used for staff development study teams and new teacher mentoring—for the amount of $200,100.

## One- and Two-Way Vehicles of Communication Are Used

Key messages and general information about the school system are communicated in a variety of ways. We have developed internal and external mechanisms such as:

• *District Newsletters.* Two newsletters are prepared by the Communications staff. The first is the **Maine Education**, a semiannual publication sent to parents, parents of incoming freshmen, and key communicators in the community. Key communicators include realtors, representatives of the media, Chambers of Commerce officials, and leaders in government, businesses, foundations, churches, service clubs, and civic groups. The publication is printed in a large tabloid format. Each issue contains an in-depth feature article (e.g., about education to career partnerships with business, community involvement, fiscal responsibility and creativity), a section spotlighting one of the schools (done on a rotating basis), and a broad range of shorter articles.

The second newsletter is called *Parent to Parent.* This is a semiannual publication partially written by parents, exclusively for parents. It is full of "insider" information and suggestions from guidance personnel in the district and contains essential information beyond district policy and rules that are of interest to parents (e.g., curfew regu-

lations in the nine communities served by District 207 and in Chicago).

• *Informational Bulletins.* These are one-page listings of high priority, high profile information. These bulletins are distributed throughout the community.

• *Proactive media relations.* An effective program of media relations greatly facilitates "telling our story." Timely releases of information via media alerts, press releases, and "just the facts" e-mails (which busy reporters really appreciate), and quick response to reporters' inquiries not only get the district great coverage, they also generate empathy and understanding for the district's mission. The prompt release of information—especially when the information pertains to hot topics like school safety and rapid changes in state assessments, standards, and policies—also serves to educate the public. The goal is to achieve public understanding by exposing them to balanced reporting.

• *Brochures.* The *Boundary Brochure* for example, contains general information about the school district and provides a map detailing attendance boundaries for each school.

• *Councils.* Members of two councils are vital links to two key publics. The *Parent Advisory Council*, composed of parents from all three schools, meets four times a year. The group's purpose is twofold: to provide the district with vital input; to act as visionaries for district officials. Members also serve as ambassadors, sharing *district-wide* perspectives with other parents. The *Senior Citizen Advisory Council* also generally meets quarterly. Activities consist of school tours and luncheons, including classroom visits and direct interactions with students, faculty, and administrators. Intergenerational activities include joint service projects and a thematic writing project where stories are posted on the Northwestern University's Collaboratory Web page.

• *Handbook for Parents.* This document contains essential information about the district, policies, and rules. For example, it includes a directory of school staff, calendars, pupil conduct regulations, student activities, guidance program information and calendar, parent organizations, and explanations of relevant school policies.

• *Viewpoint cards.* At monthly Board of Education meetings, citizens, employees and students are able to speak at designated times. A person seeking to exercise this privilege fills out a viewpoint card, briefly stating the topic to be addressed. The card also notifies the speaker that if questions cannot be answered at that night's meeting, a response will be forthcoming from a school official as soon as possible.

• *Community Involvement and Interaction.* Honest personal communications with external audiences are constantly encouraged. Such efforts are enhanced when employees become directly involved in community activities. Examples of this involvement range from participation in local United Way campaigns to participation in district parent and senior citizen advisory council meetings. Special efforts are made to keep Realtors informed about the school district. We maintain an ongoing relationship with those who function within district boundaries. This relationship allows school officials to transmit important messages (e.g., about boundaries, programs) and receive vital information about public perceptions and opinions.

Such communications are especially important when district personnel need to be made aware of misconceptions and unfounded rumors. Information packets are routinely provided to Realtors. Included are district and individual school information, copies of documents useful to prospective homebuyers, and other pertinent information (e.g., school report cards, profile sheets).

Some communication mechanisms are designated for both internal and external audiences. Among these are the following:

• *Interaction with the District 207 Educational Foundation.* The communications director serves as a resource person and liaison to the school district's foundation (an independent, not-for-profit organization). In this capacity, she provides public relations support to the Foundation and assists in the development of "marketing" brochures for targeted programs.

• *District Website.* The goal is to create informative, well designed, user-friendly Web pages that are easy to navigate. With the help of trusted student interns, the communications director and individual school Website coordinators develop pages that provide general and specific information that support critical projects, such as teacher recruitment. Student talent and expertise are used as a cost-effective way to develop and maintain this program. For example, the director of communications and a student intern are developing an "interactive" Board of Education page, allowing patrons to exchange information.

• *School public relations liaisons.* An English teacher in each school is paid a stipend and receives one to two periods of assigned time daily to work on publicity and school-specific news. These assignments permit the district's director of communications to focus on district-wide news, publicity, and initiatives. At the occasional request of the liaisons or principals, however, the director may cover major news stories and write school-specific features about "super stars." The PR liaisons program is cost effective, especially considering the wide coverage provided.

• *Recruitment Materials.* The Communications staff prepares materials for employee recruitment. Examples include folders containing pertinent information for prospective employees and display materials (e.g., a table banner) for recruitment fairs.

Some mechanisms are designed primarily for internal audiences.

• *Employee Recognition Programs.* Employee service is recognized after only five years and continues at five-year intervals to 30+ years. Anniversary employees receive designated gifts at special school-wide celebrations given in their honor or they can donate the cash value of their gift to the district's Educational Foundation.

• *Curriculum Publications.* Key messages also get delivered through publications about programming. Examples include curriculum guides, a summer school brochure, and *Learn to Read, Read to Learn*, a reading strategies ringed booklet for classroom use.

• *Staff Newsletter. Colleagues* is the district's all-staff newsletter, published twice a year. The newsletter is written for all 900-plus district employees. Copies are also distributed to the Parent Advisory Council and media. Prior to its first writing, an extensive survey was distributed to all faculty and staff to ascertain their top areas of interest. The newsletter generally contains two in-

depth articles of high interest to faculty and staff. An example is a recent article about the district's long-range technology plan. Other features include: (1) profiles of employees describing their unusual hobbies and/or accomplishments; (2) a "Colleague to Colleague" column providing successful examples of engaging teaching; (3) a "Bulletin Board" column that highlights employees' professional accomplishments and community service; (4) a "New Colleagues" column featuring pictures and biographies of the newest staff members; (5) a "Did You Know" column describing lessor-known departments, programs and partnerships.

• *Staff Development Newsletter.* This newsletter is published three times a year and contains a feature article and a comprehensive listing of learning opportunities.

The Communication staff plays an integral role in many other school district activities. They include special announcements, promotional material for luncheons and banquets, and consultation on important decisions affecting the district's image.

The overall goal of each of the staff's activities is to portray a realistic and positive picture of the district's programs and people. Two considerations determine whether the communications staff will become involved in a project:

• Does the project support the district's mission?

• Does the project provide the opportunity to engage in valid and two-way communication?

Ultimately, the success of the communications program is determined by the extent to which members of the school district staff functions closely with the people in our external and internal communities.

If citizens and district staff have confidence in the schools, if they support the district's mission, and if they elect to participate in their schools, the quality and relevance of educational programs are enhanced.

Elizabeth Paine is director of communications for the three-high school district (Maine Twp. #207, 1131 South Dee Rd., Park Ridge Il 60068. 847-698-3600. C. Steven Snider is superintendent. The three high school principals are Thomas Cachur (South), Carol Grenier (East), and Paul Leathem (West). Director Paine can supply samples of district publication on request.

When Maine Township was formally organized in the mid-1800s, it had an Indian name that referred to a stream that runs through the area. As many or most of the settlers had come from the State of Maine, that same name was chosen for the new township.

## Maine Township Schools Data

| | |
|---|---|
| **Student enrollment** | 6,300 |
| **% to Post-High Training** | 88% |
| **Schools** | 3 High Schools |
| **Racial Mix** | Hispanic 10%<br>Black 2%<br>Anglo 73%<br>Asian 14% |
| **Staff** | 900 |

**Notes:** Students in nine separate communities attend elementary schools in separate (and private) school systems, and then enroll in the three high schools run by the Maine Township school system...Among Maine graduates are Hillary Rodham Clinton and Harrison Ford.

*We judge ourselves by our motives and we judge others by their actions.*

*Dwight Morrow*

# Passing Bond Referenda: Four Steps to Success

by Elaine Baker

Preparing for and passing a bond referendum is not for the faint of heart! District administrators must do their homework, and this includes identifying and verifying facility needs and communicating them to others. The task entails working closely with school board members, to be sure that the political conditions are favorable for winning a bond election, and enlisting the support of the district's employees to that end.

This article discusses ideas and actions that have been successful in the Rock Hill School District Three in presenting referenda to voters. Our rapidly growing school system, located in Rock Hill, South Carolina, enrolls 14,600 pupils and is located 25 miles south of Charlotte, North Carolina. School boards in South Carolina are required by state statute to pass voter referenda for bond sales for capital projects that exceed eight percent of property assessed valuation. The most recent referenda for Rock Hill facility projects occurred in 1985, 1988, and 1996; in all three instances, the requested tax increases were approved, and we are now planning for another in the spring of 2000.

## Practices Found to be Effective

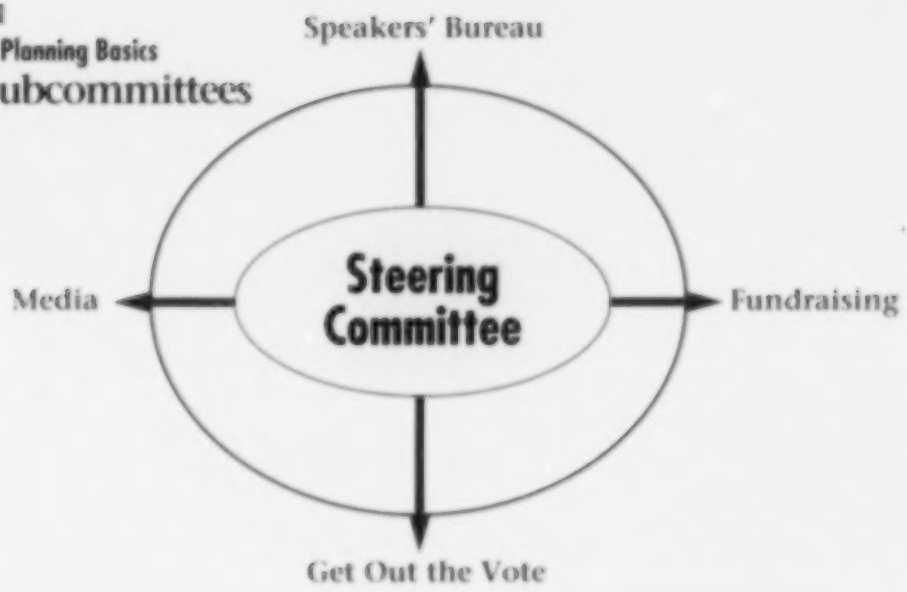
Rock Hill is a close-knit, yet progressive city whose residents have a practical eye toward the future. They expect excellence in their schools, and they often contribute time and talent to help achieve that lofty goal. Their willingness to get involved with public schools, however, does not mean that they have routinely supported tax increase initiatives. Getting their support for a bond referendum has required a concerted effort from the district's leadership team. The verification of proposed needs, accomplished through accurate information and candid communication, has been central to this task.

Based on past experiences, the board has adopted procedures for gaining public support for a tax referendum. These processes involve both the exchange of information and the manner in which decisions are made. The basic elements of planning and executing our strategy are outlined here.

### 1. Form a Steering Committee

As soon as the need for a building project requiring a referendum becomes apparent to the school board, the administrative staff forms a steering committee. The 15 members of this group represent a broad spectrum of

Figure 1
**Rock Hill Planning Basics**
**Key Subcommittees**




the community; diversification is based on age, gender, race, social class, political affiliation, and education. Both parents and citizens **without** school-age children are included. Care is taken to appoint individuals who are viewed as trustworthy and credible by the district's taxpayers.

Steering committee members meet three other criteria. First, they are expected to be *supportive*; that is, they should believe that the identified needs expressed by district officials are valid and that the passage of the referendum is necessary. Second, they are expected to be *optimistic*; that is, they should believe that the referendum would pass if the needs were properly explained to the public. Third, they are expected to be *committed*; that is, they should be willing and able to devote the time and energy necessary to complete the assigned responsibilities. The last criterion is especially important because committee members function as key communicators, playing an active role validating the identified needs in their conversations with other taxpayers.

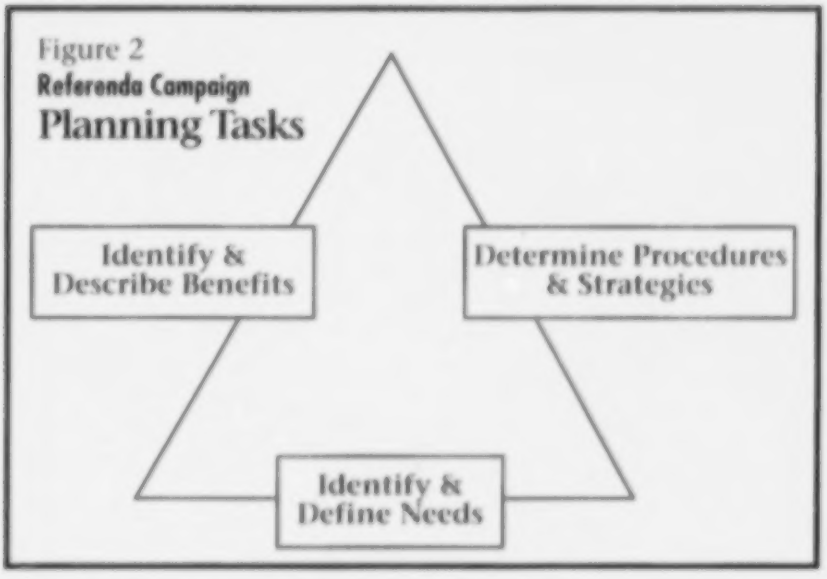
Members of the steering committee have two duties. First, they recruit a cross section of 10-12 community leaders who also are willing to promote the passage of the referendum. They are expected to help broaden support for passing the referendum. Second, they serve on one of four subcommittees:

- •Speakers' Bureau
- •Fundraising
- •Get Out the Vote
- •Media.

The primary function of the *Speakers' Bureau* Subcommittee is to schedule supportive speakers for civic, professional, school, and other community group meetings. This subcommittee also is responsible for collecting 1,000 taxpayer signatures that will appear in advertisements endorsing the referendum.

As public funds can not be used to pay for advertisements, we must rely on donations to promote our position. The sole purpose of the *Fundraising* Subcommittee is to collect funds from individuals and businesses to pay for supportive ads that appear in the media.

The primary task of the *Get Out the Vote* Subcommittee is to recruit 25-30 volunteers. These volunteers contact potential voters either by telephone or by mail. They then develop lists of sup-




porters. The day before the referendum, the volunteers contact those on the lists reminding them to vote.

The *Media* Subcommittee also recruits volunteers. The purpose here is to find individuals who can assist us with developing news releases and positive publicity. The volunteers also help identify individuals willing to write supportive letters to the local newspapers (e.g., letters to the editor).

### 2. Maintain Continuous Two-Way Communication

School officials who initiate communications with local residents **only** when they need something can expect resentment. For this reason, the staff maintains an ongoing year-round exchange of information with the community. We do this to provide information on a regular and continuous basis and to learn the needs and wants being expressed by our patrons. Periodically, the latter is done more formally through public opinion polls. Citizens are not easily fooled; they know when they are being courted simply to acquire political support. The fact that our efforts to communicate during the bond campaign did not appear unusual is a positive factor.

### 3. Develop a Plan

In approaching the critical task of passing a referendum, we do not simply rely on good luck. Working with the Steering Committee, we develop a plan that has three primary components. The first identifies and defines the needs that we propose to address. These clarifications increase the likelihood that communication about the purposes of the referendum will be consistent. The second component enumerates potential benefits; likely gains for students and the general community are described. The third component focuses on procedural matters. Included are strategies, a schedule for completing essential tasks, and the assignments of responsibilities for completing them. The latter pertains to assigning duties for scheduling meetings, assessing public sentiment, preparing written materials, issuing press releases, and the like.

### 4. Initiate Specific Actions

In conjunction with the Steering Committee's plan, several specific initiatives are executed. Each has been essential to gaining public support.

•*Determine the information the public*

*desires or needs.* Some voters have requested general information while others ask for details. Our communications were structured to meet both requests. The foci of our efforts, however, is always defining the needs and explaining likely benefits.

•*Inform school district employees.* Before making community presentations, we have special staff meetings in every school. At these sessions, we identify and define the needs, explaining how students and the community will benefit when the needs are met, explain our intended strategies to pass the referendum, and share other pertinent facts. Attendees are encouraged to ask questions and to make comments—they always do. The primary objectives of these staff meetings are to ensure that the district's employees are properly informed and to encourage them to pass the information to parents, neighbors and others. The investment of time pays dividends, because our employees become the district's most influential ambassadors.

•*Order voter registration forms.* For whatever reasons, many eligible residents are not registered to vote. We make it relatively easy for them to do so. We especially try to accommodate persons who are likely to support the referendum. For example, voter registration forms are made available to employees and eligible students through government and economics classes (a practice that is carried out each year regardless of whether the district is having a referendum). In addition, school officials offer advice about voter registration. These services have been particularly productive in referendum years, because most employees and students who registered as a result, appeared to vote favorably on the referendum.

•*Communicate at every opportunity.* Several different communication tools are employed in the effort to "tell our story." Messages are delivered frequently to the local news media, parent leaders, community leaders, and anyone else who is willing to listen. We also contact local clubs, organizations, and churches to see if they would schedule speakers who would outline the needs and benefits associated with the referendum. We propose a team of two speakers–an educator and a community or business leader–so that different perspectives will be presented. If our request is rejected, we seek permission to have 10 to 15 minutes to distribute information and to answer questions.

## Rock Hill Schools Data

| | |
|---|---|
| **Student enrollment** | 14,600 |
| **% to Post-High Training** | 60% |
| **Schools** | 14 Elementary<br>4 Middle<br>2 Secondary<br>1 Vocational |
| **Racial Mix** | Anglo 60%<br>Black 38%<br>Other 2% |
| **Staff** | 1,500 |

**Notes:** The Rock Hill district is one of three in York County, and is in many ways a suburb of nearby Charlotte, North Carolina. Local citizens are asked to serve on committees, as opposed to using people from outside agencies, to make calls, canvas residents.

Question and Answer Sheet

Sample Task-Time Lines

Basic Information

Almost always, this request has been approved.

We also communicate via individual school newsletters. The Department of Information Services staff prepares material for principals to insert in these publications, and this process helps us to deliver consistent messages to readers. The district's educational access television channel, local radio talk shows, the district's Web site, school board meetings, newspapers, and e-mail are other vehicles used to distribute information.

•*Identify and collaborate with key communicators.* The superintendent maintains a list of 600 key communicators (parent leaders, community leaders, governmental officials, and others who are active in the community). These individuals receive a minimum of four personal letters about activities and concerns about our schools from the superintendent each year. In preparation for a referendum, the key communicators receive a special letter and a brochure detailing facts about the referendum. This asks them to share the





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information contained in the brochure and to let district officials know if there are concerns not being addressed.

•*Word the ballot properly.* In a time when many taxpayers believe that schools can do more with less, wording on a referendum ballot can be extremely important. The wording must be clear and the options available to voters easily understood. For example, if voters are given choices or if there are multiple construction projects being proposed, separate questions on these matters might be included on the ballot. Because the school district has control over wording, we always are mindful of these conditions.

•*Evaluate the outcomes.* Once the vote is known, the Steering Committee and district administrators evaluate the entire process. Our purpose is to answer relevant questions such as:

> What important group or segment of the population was ignored?
> Was our message consistent?
> What could we have done better?
> What could we have done in a timelier manner?
> What groups and individuals should receive letters of appreciation?

This evaluation causes us to reflect on effective practices. Learning from experience is very important for us, because in our growing community, the next referendum is just around the corner.

## Final Thoughts

Our school system has a distinct advantage in passing referenda because of ongoing communication with students, employees, and other residents. We believe the initiatives have passed because district officials were able to show that a need existed and that students and the entire community would benefit if that need was met. Our ability to do this has been facilitated by two conditions, credibility and an effective communication process. Both were in place prior to a decision to pursue a referendum. As a result, information activities during the referendum campaign do not appear to be highly unusual.

But simply having an established record of public communication is not enough to ensure passing a referendum. The active support of employees, students, parents, and key community leaders also is pivotal. Success is also attributable to two other factors.

First, we always develop a plan and corresponding strategies very early in the process.

Second, committee members and the volunteers they recruited represent a broad spectrum of the community. Often these individuals and members of their families become enthusiastic advocates for voting "yes" on the referendum.

Elaine Baker is director of community relations, and is the assistant to the superintendent, Phillip J. McDaniel (Rock Hill Schools, P.O. Drawer 10072, Rock Hill, SC 29731, 803-981-1000). Elaine began work with the district in the late 1960s as a secretary. She went on to earn a college degree and become a central office administrator in the 1970s. A local newspaper editor convinced the board and superintendent that an office to handle media and community inquiries would be useful, and Elaine has served as director in that office since 1974.

# Comprehensive Public Relations *Requires a Team Approach*

By Doug Otto and Carole Greisdorf

What does it take to provide an excellent education? We all agree outstanding teachers, involved and supportive parents, visionary school boards and administrators, and adequate resources are necessary. But how many people in public education believe that a strong communications program is also part of the winning recipe?

In our opinion, the need for increased information, communication, and engagement explains why a well-rounded communication and public relations program has become essential to effective practice in school administration.

In the Plano Independent School District, located 23 miles north of Dallas, Texas, board members and superintendents over the past few decades have had the foresight to develop a comprehensive communications department. It is part of the administrative and support structure in this rapidly-growing district of 45,000 students. The staff of this department strives to meet the needs of diverse internal and external audiences in a proactive, positive manner.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how a communications unit functions as part of the administrative team in a large suburban district. First, the support structure for public relations in the PISD is described; second, the role of this district's Communications Department is illustrated through actual critical incidents. Three problem situations are shown to indicate how this department is central to collaborative decisions.

## *Board Policy* Specifies Role of Communication

The district's commitment to a strong community relations program stems from beliefs, strategic goals and guiding principles published in the Board's Strategic Plan. The Board of Trustees developed the following belief statements:

- Excellence in education is best achieved through a shared vision and cooperative effort of students, their family, staff and the community.
- Continuous communications enhances education, strengthens relationships, and fosters trust and unity.

The Board also wrote this guiding principle in its Strategic Plan, "We will

**And a third element of Board commitment is found in its strategic goals, "We will proactively work with the community to develop and achieve a shared vision."**

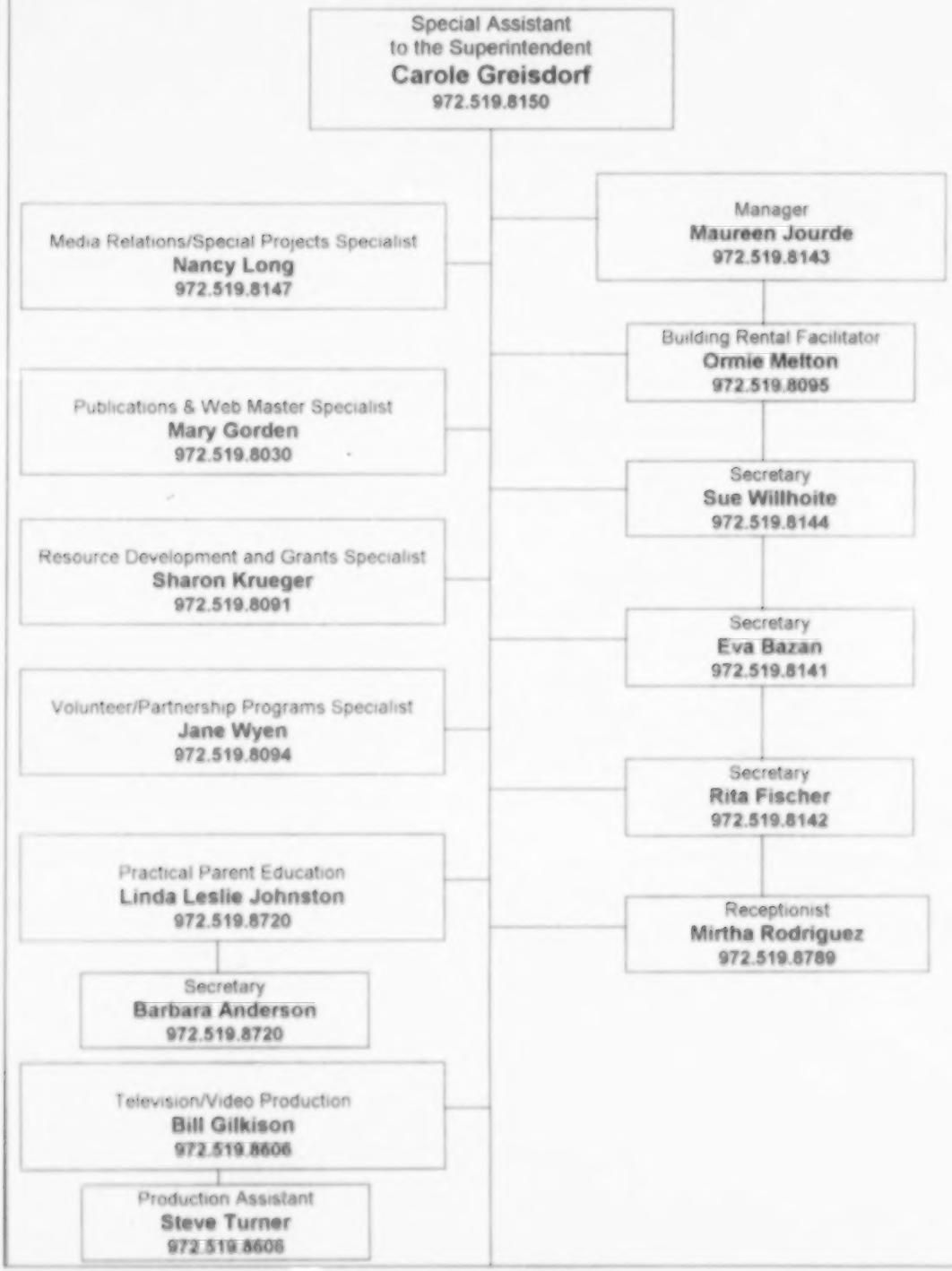
encourage and be responsive to high community expectations consistent with our mission." And a third element of Board commitment is found in its strategic goals, "We will proactively work with the community to develop and achieve a shared vision."

More generally, the communications program is supported by community expectations. Parents and other district residents, most of whom are highly educated, expect excellence. They also want to contribute to the process of educating the community's youth. Thus, continuous two-way communication and collaboration between the school district and the larger comm..nity is viewed as a necessity in the PISD.

### Scope of the Program Is System-Wide

Fortunately, the district's Board of Trustees and administrators are committed to having a first-rate communications operation. They provide the resources necessary to employ 14 staff members and to fund the day-to-day operations of the district's comprehensive program. The Communication

# Plano Independent School District
## Communications Department
## Organizational Diagram



Department's services are available to the Board of Trustees, administrative staff, other employees and community.

The department's general goal is to contributes the district's effectiveness by increasing public understanding, support and involvement. Public relations is treated as an essential part of administration. This disposition has two dimensions.

First, all administrators in the district participate in public relations activities, and the department staff's role is to provide direct support and assistance to them. In this regard, communications personnel encourage, facilitate, and support rather than control and manage.

Second, the department is an integral part of the district's administrative team. This is because information and communication are treated as requisite elements of leadership and decision making.

Broadly, the department's operations are divided into two functions.

The first includes operations directly associated with public relations. The following exemplify responsibilities in this category:

- *Publications* (included are relocations packets, information brochures, weekly newsletters for employees and key communicators, and quarterly newsletters

## How the Communications Program Is Evaluated

The Plano ISD communications program is evaluated in various ways. These include:

- The district staff conducts an attitude survey of parents, teachers and other employees and high school seniors biennially. Included in the survey are direct questions about the quality of the communications effort and specific programs such as whether or not patrons watch the district's television channel, use our Website, and where they receive news about the schools and district.
- We enter our publications and other products in various competitions. We have won top awards from the National School Public Relations Association, the Texas School Public Relations Association and the Cinema in Industry Award. We have also won TELLY Awards, Communicator Awards and the US Film and Video Festival Awards.
- The public tells us about the quality of our outreach programs by the increasing numbers of school mentors, volunteers, and participation in citizen advisory committees. They also cast a ballot in support of our efforts by consistently voting for bond elections over the past 10 years that have totaled more than $350 million. Also evaluate our program based on our relations with the media and the quality of the stories or we reporting we receive. We do not measure quality by the number or inches of print, but instead it is based on whether reporters understand what we are doing and report it accurately and fairly.
- We conduct periodic surveys in our publications regarding their quality, usefulness and readability.
- We report to the school board on our success at meeting and exceeding the board's goals.

for the community)
- *Website maintenance* (management of all information and news releases)
- *Media relations*
- *Coordination of special events* (e.g., celebrations and recognition events)
- *Coordination of business partnerships*
- *Coordination of volunteers and mentors* (including tutors and school-level volunteers)
- *Television and video production* (e.g., news production, interviews, educational programming)
- *Customer relations training* (i.e., staff development programs for employees regarding working with the public)
- *Community and parent group relations* (e.g., serving as the liaison to PTA Council, providing data to the local Chamber of Commerce)
- *Involvement with the district's foundation* (e.g., advising about fund-raising)
- *Public relations counseling* (primarily for board members and administrators)
- *Conducting surveys and opinion polls*
- *Realtor relations* (e.g., providing information packets, exchanging information)

Second, the department's staff members also have responsibilities that relate to general administration. Activities in this domain require the special assistant to the superintendent, who is in charge of the department, to serve as a member of the district's administrative team. Examples of duties in this category include:

- Coordinating *facility rental decisions* (e.g., providing coordination of community use of facilities)
- Assisting with *school-based improvement* (training and monitoring the activities of school-based improvement committees)
- Coordinating *external funding efforts* ( e.g., developing or coordinating the preparation of grant applications and funding through the district's foundation)
- Coordinating the *policy development and review process*
- Coordinating the *strategic planning process*
- Coordinating *district elections* (school board and bond elections)

In summary, the department's broad scope of responsibilities reflects the philosophical conviction that community relations are essential to effective leadership. Collaboration rather than control is used to retain open and two-way relationships internally and externally.

## Case Examples

The effectiveness of the Communications Department is best demonstrated through its involvement in real situations. Three situations are summarized here to exhibit performance. In each instance, anticipation or quick response was critical to success. When a problem or need emerged, scenarios were developed and analyzed to determine how effective communication could be used to reduce conflict or contribute to a quality decision. This strategy ensured that the right messages were delivered by the appropriate persons in a timely manner.

### The Case of a Custodian with a Criminal Record

In 1995, a potentially negative case involving a custodian with a criminal record arose. During the summer vacation, an investigative reporter discovered that the individual had been

arrested, convicted and served a sentence on assault charges (he had lied on his application and had been hired prior to the district's criminal history checks being implemented). The reporter planned to disclose the criminal history of the employee in an upcoming news broadcast.

School officials were concerned about two dimensions of this problem. First, there was the prospect of negative publicity. Second, district policy called for the employee to be dismissed because of his criminal record. Dismissal, however, could be a very unpopular decision. Many members of the school's community liked the custodian, and it was certainly possible that they would defend him. For instance, they might argue that he had served his time and had been rehabilitated.

Selected members of the district's administrative team, including the principal in the school affected, the assistant superintendent for human resources, the director of communications, and a media relations specialist assumed the responsibility of dealing with the situation. An approach based on open communication was developed. Administrators first met with parent association representatives prior to the anticipated news broadcast. During this meeting:

- The administrators outlined the situation and explained policy and potential risks.
- The parents asked pertinent questions and administrators answered them.
- Meetings were planned to brief the school staff and members of the larger community.
- The reporter who was breaking the story and other reporters were given access to administrators and selected parents.
- A press conference was scheduled prior to the anticipated news broadcast making it possible for the school officials to present their side of the story first.

Eventually, the custodian was dismissed because of violations of district

## Plano Overview

| | |
|---|---|
| **Student enrollment** | 45,000 |
| **% to Post-High Training** | 90% |
| **Schools** | 37 Elementary<br>11 Middle<br>5 High (9th, 10th)<br>3 Senior High (11th, 12th)<br>1 Special program, needs<br>1 Preschool (disabilities) |
| **Racial Mix** | Black 6%<br>Anglo 75%<br>Asian 12%<br>Hispanic 6% |
| **Employees** | 6,000 |

**Notes:** Student Asian population increased from 6% in 1998 to 12% in 1999...Plano has unemplyment rate of 2.5%...Plano ranks 19th nationally among cities in percentage of adults who are college graduates....Average home value is $160,000.

policy. However, the actions of the administrative group reduced both the possible negative consequences of the story being released and the reactions to the dismissal. Parents and other members of the school community appreciated having been informed and involved.

## The Case of Rezoning School Boundaries

The contentious issue of rezoning attendance boundaries provides the second example of the effective use of communication. In the past, we followed a common practice: an administrative team made rezoning decisions. That is to say, this group put together a proposal, took it to the school board for approval, and informed the public of the approved changes. This approach produced many dissatisfied parents and acrimonious board meetings.

Over time, school officials gained an understanding of why it is important for constituents to be involved in this process. As a result, the process was changed, becoming more democratic and inclusive. With each instance of rezoning, the approach was improved. The current practice is to use a broad-based committee consisting of these individuals:

- The presidents of the parent associations of each school potentially affected
- Randomly selected parents or community volunteers
- School district staff (area assistant superintendents, affected principals, and representatives from the following departments: business services, safety and security, transportation, demographics, and communications)

All parents in the schools potentially affected by rezoning decisions are notified by mail that the matter will be considered, and they are invited to volunteer for service on the decision-making committee. In addition, information about the process is made available to the media and placed on the district's Website.

District staff members have the responsibility of providing accurate and complete information to others on the decision-making committee. The meetings are open, and representatives of the media are invited and encouraged to report the committee's activities. Once the committee has formulated a recommendation, this information is sent via mail to parents. The process culminates with the Board of Trustees holding a public hearing on the recommendation before a final vote is taken. Following the board's action, letters are again sent to every family affected.

The more inclusive process, based on effective communication, has reduced a great deal of the conflict surrounding boundary decisions. More important, the open process has increased the quantity and quality of information, resulting in more effective decisions.

## The Case of the Proposed New High School

A third example of how the staff of the Communications Department becomes involved in critical decisions pertains to the establishment of the district's third senior high school. The new school would be the first senior high to be opened in the district in 17 years. Many parents and students were passionate about continuing at their currently assigned school. Among the questions that were being raised were

the following:

- •Would the school open for juniors only, with the senior class to be added the following year?
- •Would a full-fledged academic program be instituted, including the full gamut of Advanced Placement courses?
- •Would the school's extracurricular program include all sports, music and other components?
- •Who would the principal be and when would the appointment take place?
- •How would the name of the school be decided?
- •What would the school colors and mascot be?
- •Would school attendance boundaries be affected?

More than two years before the school was to be constructed emotions were running high. Parents of young children not immediately affected were even voicing concerns.

A committee consisting of parents, students and staff was formed to make decisions about the new school. A series of letters was sent to parents communicating the plans for the new school and the committee's progress. Frequent communication with local reporters also helped keep the issue before the public. District administrators served as resources to the committee and provided the information necessary to help the members make well-informed recommendations. Public forums were held at which the Board of Trustees gathered input, talked with the public and explained the rationale for the decisions that were to be made.

The committees worked on issues such as curriculum, extra-curricular programming, and attendance boundaries. They met regularly, communicated with the school board, and gamered input from throughout the community. The result has been that the people in the community to be served by the school feels a great sense of ownership for their new school. Now, with the school's imminent opening, enthusiasm, involvement and support promise a strong senior high school program.

## Final Thoughts

In an information age, a strong two-way communication program between a school district and the community is an absolute necessity. How authorities in school districts respond to this need, however, depends largely on philosophy and commitment. The program profiled in this article exemplifies effective practice in a large suburban district.

The Plano Communications Department has been constructed on a foundation of community standards and administrative and Board support and as a result has become a critical component of all educational and support operations in the school district.

Doug Otto is superintendent of Plano School District. Carole Greisdorf is special assistant to the superintendent and is responsible for the district's Communications Department (2700 W. 15th St., Plano, TX 75075-7543).

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*Moseley's Truism: You may not always get what you pay for, but you always pay for what you get.*

*Albert G. Moseley*

# Service by Students in the Community–

## Should it be voluntary or required, or not even offered?

By Paul M. Terry and Theodore J. Kowalski

The primary function of public education has always been to develop students personally, intellectually, and socially. In past decades, community life was central to these developmental tasks. Social interactions in a community context were especially important with respect to teaching citizenship, understanding democracy, and developing a commitment to assist others.

Today, unfortunately, "opportunities to serve at the community level have become less connected to the lives of our youth."[1] Commenting on this void, Eberly [2] predicted in 1993 that some students would not adjust positively to adulthood because of their detachment from communal experiences.

Now, there is interest in schools adopting community service programs. The interest may be related to changing social conditions and also may be generated by a conviction that **social settings outside of school** are potentially relevant learning laboratories. The idea of relevance has long been a central concept of progressive education advanced by such figures as John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick, and George Counts. Much more recently, the Commission on the Restructuring of the American High School included four community and social themes among its nine reform topics. Two of them speak directly to integrating communities and schools:

- High school must provide an underpinning for good citizenship and for full participation in the life of a democracy.
- High school must play a role in the personal development of young people, as social beings that have needs beyond those that are strictly academic. (NASSP, 1996).

There is an abundance of evidence supporting the conclusion that activities of young people in community service provide a positive learning experience.[3][11] Also, some writers have pointed out that educators are highly effective when they are able to both elevate academic experiences and raise social consciousness.[12] There are, however, lingering questions about the feasibility of requiring community service. For instance: Can students be required to perform such service? And is community service really in the best interests of students?

***Many students overlook the value of contacts, relationships, and connections with people outside of school.***

Two contentions regarding student community service are central to this article. The first is that the **benefits of community service far outweigh its shortcomings**; the second is that arguments **against requiring** the program often **obscure the value of community service**. After examining both of these positions, the voluntary approach of service learning is presented as a realistic option for gaining a high percentage of participation while circumventing common objections.

## Arguments For and Against the Program

In contemplating the issue of student community service, school officials must make two separate decisions: whether to offer the program and whether to require the program. Some policymakers see the two questions as inextricably linked. For example, they believe that the only way to offer the program is to make it mandatory, because voluntary approaches typically have low participation rates. But for this article, the two issues are separated.

Arguments for and against any form of community service are examined first.

## What Those in Favor of Community Service Say

Despite less than uniform convictions, community service of our students is more widespread than most imagine. Fraser, for instance, found that 44 percent of high school students in the early 1990s had participated in some form of unpaid community service. He also found that many of the participants simply volunteered their time and energy, often without understanding the scope of possible benefits.

Potential gains for students and society vary from community to community depending on situational variables, needs, and wants. Nevertheless, several rewards are cogent to virtually all situations. They include the following:

- *Development of self-esteem.* Kiner purports that one of the most significant outcomes of community service is the development of self-esteem. Students who become involved tend to move from seeing themselves as **lifeless participants** in the educational system to seeing themselves as **active learners** who are making positive contributions. They begin to believe that they can make a difference in this world, and their in-school experiences become more relevant in the context of external learning activities. As one student stated, "this experience has proved to me that I am able to think for myself and from that, learn by myself."
- *Contributing to the effectiveness of local government.* Community service is also a way for government to address numerous problems. In the aftermath of recent shooting deaths in schools, citizens are increasingly demanding something be done to reduce youth

violence. But government officials have only a limited capacity to deal with this complex social problem. Community service represents an efficient use of resources. Moreover, Sauerwein[11] views community service as an effective way to contribute to reconstructing communities.

• *Elimination of Alienation.* Youth violence and other behavioral problems are often associated with feelings of alienation. Some students live in homes where they have very limited contact with adults; some have few friends; some see themselves as misfits and social outcasts. For these students, community service may provide a mechanism for overcoming these problems. By creating strong ties to others, students can learn to be socially responsible citizens and they can gain a different perspective about themselves.

• *Directing Adolescent Energy to Positive Outcomes.* Adolescents have a great deal of energy that needs to be expressed. Unfortunately, the chosen outlets are not always socially acceptable or beneficial-either for the individual or for society. Community service provides students with a healthy outlet to express themselves. In this respect, service is similar to extracurricular activities. Recognizing this, Sauerwein[11] wrote, "Imagine what would happen if kids involved in violence used their energy to help communities."

• *Learning to Live in a Democracy.* Students providing community service also learn important lessons about cooperation and life in a democratic society. Gorsalez, Wagner, and Brunton[1] quoted one student who reflected on his experiences in performing community service, "I realize that we have to help one another. We are all humans." Every student should gain this level of awareness about life in modern society, because the quality of adulthood is affected by one's ability to understand the dynamics of human relationships. And well-adjusted citizens affect the quality of social conditions.

• *Increasing the Relevancy of Learning.* Often community service provides highly relevant learning opportunities. That is, the experiences interface with the regular curriculum, because assignments are an extension of the regular school program. Working with city government, for example, may allow students to test their classroom knowledge about civics. The most effective community service programs are implemented as part of the educational program rather than a mutually exclusive attachment.[11]

• *Learning to Develop Social Relationships.* Many students overlook the value of contacts, relationships, and connections with people outside of school. Some adults, for example, do not discover the importance of being connected to others until they face a serious problem. Service programs provide an excellent vehicle for students to broaden their world and increase their contact with adults.

This list is by no means exhaustive. Other benefits may be idiosyncratic to programs or participants. For example, some students find mentors, some discover that they are "gifted" in doing certain jobs, and some are even aided in making career decisions.

## What Those Opposed to Community Service Say

Some critics question the value of community service for students. They charge that some students are simply given menial tasks, such as picking up

paper around a city park. More important, this work is often done on school time, causing the student to miss structured learning opportunities, they say.

Another possible objection is potential liability. School boards have commonly been held responsible by the courts for damages resulting from or associated with injuries occurring during sponsored off-campus activities. While the issue of liability relates to all types of community service, it more directly affects mandatory programs.[7]

Logistical problems—such as time, money, transportation and assignment of personnel—are another concern. Placing students in off-campus settings generates a multitude of questions about resource allocation. How will students get to and from their service assignments? How will regular classroom time be affected? What additional responsibilities do teachers and parents assume?

Community service programs are sometimes attacked because they place students in situations for which they are not adequately prepared. The lack of preparedness may relate to knowledge, skills and maturity. For example, a student assigned to a government office may be asked to answer letters from concerned citizens. If he or she does not have adequate writing skills, the assignment can be intimidating and frustrating. Or, a student placed in a nursing home, hospital or health clinic may not be psychologically prepared for the assignment. Allowing students to choose an activity does not necessarily resolve readiness concerns. Some students may not realize that they are not prepared emotionally for an experience until they are placed in the situation.[8]

## Arguments For and Against Mandatory Service

In addition to the points cogent to all service programs, there are arguments for and against requiring student participation. Usually, these are the most politically charged debates.

### Mandatory, Yes

Proponents of mandatory programs often cite three arguments supporting their position. They are the overall **importance** of the activity, the **benefits to society**, and the **benefits to the individual**.

- *Sufficient Importance.* Here proponents contend that service experiences are sufficiently important to require them for every student. This is the same rationale offered by policymakers and school officials with regard to studying basic subjects, such as English, mathematics, and science. Thus, requiring community service has implications for organizational culture. That is, there is a symbolic value associated with elevating the activity to the status of primary academic subjects.[9]
- *Promoting Fraternity.* One of the basic values that has guided the formation of public education in the United States is fraternity. This belief is predicated on teaching citizens to live with each other. Community service often brings students together for reasons that have little to do with race, economic status, ability, or academic performance. An honor student may find herself working side-by-side on projects with at-risk students; a football player may be teamed with a student with physical disabilities. In essence, proponents of mandatory programs argue that service experiences teach students

***Many times the students who receive the most rewarding experiences from community service programs are those who would not have volunteered.***

to function effectively in a multicultural society.

• *Benefits Received.* Many times the students who receive the most rewarding experiences from community service programs are those who would not have volunteered. In this regard, Morris (1992) wrote, "I've seen students stay in school because of the rewards of community service, because someone needed them."

### Mandatory, No

Claims that all students should perform community service have not gone unchallenged. Whereas general objections to community service focus on possible liabilities and inconvenience, those targeted at required approaches revolve around **constitutional, political, and philosophical objections**. For instance, one philosophical argument raised against mandatory service pertains to the perceived violation of individual freedoms. Critics argue that forcing a student to perform community service without due cause is violation of individual liberty.

Other criticisms are a mix of philosophical, political, and legal objections. An example here is found in the experience of a student with a history of volunteering for service work. After her school district made the program mandatory, she did an about face and refused to participate. Her contention was that making the program mandatory violated the spirit and purpose of service to others. She stated that prior to making service a requirement, "Everything I did came from the heart."[1] She labeled the district's mandatory program as "modern-day-slavery." Her philosophical convictions were so strong they prompted her to enter into litigation with the district, claiming that the new program was unconstitutional. She lost, however, when the court ruled that the program did not constitute involuntary servitude. Even though this case established a legal precedent, it did not eradicate other concerns.

Other objections are largely unproven assumptions. Two that have been especially evident are the following:

1. A student's academic work will suffer because time devoted to service will come at the expense of academic time.

2. Most students have a negative attitude about performing service; and thus forcing them to do this simply reinforces negative feelings about government service and community involvement

The validity of these judgments, however, is dubious. In a study sponsored by the Prudential Insurance Company of America, for example,

*An option to consider is service learning as a voluntary credit course with academic growth as the top priority.*

two-thirds of the 911 students surveyed stated they thought mandatory community service was a good idea."

Although mandatory programs have not been found to be unconstitutional, and although some of the objections are unfounded, the criticisms have proven to be quite powerful. In large measure this is because of the obvious conflict between democracy and required public service. In many communities, this issue is far more important than the value of service itself.

### One Option: Service Learning as an Academic Credit Course

Recognizing that requiring community service often caused the primary issues to be obscured, forward thinking educators asked two critical questions:

Is it possible to ensure a proper balance between the interests of the student and the interests of the community?

Is it possible to achieve most of the benefits of a mandatory program while avoiding most of the objections?

Such inquiry has led to the exploration of programs that were voluntary but potentially very attractive and relevant to students. The most popular of them is **service learning**. This concept is a voluntary approach to service that places student academic growth as the top priority.[10] By linking service activities to the school's curriculum, and by allowing students to earn academic credit for their service, the concept also has been able to overcome a common problem with other voluntary approaches—low participation rates.

One district that has successfully pursued service learning is the Valparaiso Community Schools in Indiana. Service learning has been in existence in this district for nine years. Program director Pat Swanson[11] indicates that about two-thirds of all middle school and high school students are now involved. The district's superintendent, Dr. Michael Benway[12] notes, "Although the program has both academic and service elements, the academic features are emphasized. As a result, many of the objections to students performing community service have been eliminated."

Experience is revealing that service learning can achieve five critical outcomes:

1. Criticisms associated with mandatory programs are avoided.
2. The service activities are relevant to student learning, because there is a nexus between assignments and the regular curriculum.
3. The participation rate is typically quite high, because students earn academic credit.
4. Participants benefit beyond earning academic credit (e.g., they become better citizens, they learn to work with adults, they have a healthy outlet for excessive energy).
5. In many instances, learning becomes more relevant for the stu-

dent, because community involvement permits the application of knowledge and skills.

Because of these attributes, many school officials are rethinking whether they can achieve the primary objectives of community service without forcing students into it.

Implementation of any type of community service program is complicated and difficult. This is especially true of concepts such as service learning, because coordination between the regular curriculum and community assignments is absolutely essential. Therefore, support from principals, counselors, and teachers is more essential than in nonintegrated approaches.

In contemplating the adoption of such a program, key questions need to be addressed. The more important are presented here.

• *How can student learning be the primary focus?* The most effective programs are student-centered. That is, the greatest weight is given to the potential benefits of individual learners. This standard should be central to making decisions and resolving conflict. Put simply, the main objective should be to improve the quality of education. This does not mean that other possible benefits (e.g., citizenship, fraternity) are ignored. It does mean that the experiences are integrated into the curriculum and academic credit is tied to the service.

• *What level of commitment is necessary?* Service learning requires resources. The costs range from personnel to transportation. At the very earliest stages, it is necessary to determine the level of resources necessary and whether the school district is willing to make them available.

• *Who must consider the program to be worthwhile?* Another key consideration pertains to outcomes. Should student opinions outweigh community opinions? In effective programs, both student and community support are essential. Thus, both parties should view the services as worthwhile and needed.[3] Making student learning the top priority does not mean ignoring the interests and potential benefits for partners who make the program possible.

• *What planning needs to be done?* At the very least, school officials need to develop a shared vision, philosophy, and objectives. Participation in each stage should be broad and democratic. Anything less risks the possibility that students, school employees, or the community will reject or even oppose the program. Clearly, those responsible for curriculum decisions should play a pivotal role in planning.

• *What comes after planning?* Once the vision, philosophy, and objectives are agreed upon, effort is needed to gain even wider support among influential staff, students, and community partners. In part, this is accomplished by providing accurate and complete information about goals and process.

• *Who should coordinate the program?* Service learning requires effective leadership from an educator who understands the curriculum, understands the community, and is capable of making decisions about what needs to be done. Unfortunately, school districts often adopt new initiatives, especially community partnerships, without considering who will make these important decisions. Service learning also requires facilitation after the program is implemented. An effective learning coordinator has been demonstrated to be the single most important feature of a community learning program.[4]

• *What is the best way to begin?* The caliber of students involved makes a critical difference in the first few years. Failure or success of a voluntary program depends on an intricate mix of students and their assignments. Often it is best to begin by using a screening process that allows students to be selected carefully and by placing students in structured assignments. The intent is to start on a small scale and to tilt the odds in favor of success. If this is achieved, the program can be expanded incrementally. Greater risks with students and assignments are more manageable once the program has an established reputation.

Communicating progress is also extremely important. Therefore, decisions about assessment and evaluation should be in place before the program is implemented. Doing so increases the likelihood that timely information will be provided to all parties and that proper adjustments will be made as the program matures.

## Summary

Creating secure and nurturing communities will remain an important goal for America in the 21st Century.[9] This reality contributes to a growing interest in schools having students perform community service. Advocates for this program offer two intertwined benefits: it helps to rebuild communities; it results in students becoming better citizens.[10]

Yet, most school boards have not adopted the concept. Two factors are largely responsible. First, school officials often conclude that student community service will not be successful unless the program is mandated. Requiring students to do service, however, generates a multitude of criticisms and objections, several of which were discussed earlier. Second, the implementation of a community service program can be expensive and complex. Legal and financial issues prompt administrators and policymakers to question the cost-benefit ratios.

Experiences over the past few decades suggest that student community service is most likely to be successful when the program is anchored in the regular curriculum and voluntary. The former characteristic makes the program educationally sound because academic studies become more relevant through experience.[11] The latter reduces objections about servitude and incongruity with democratic principles. By squarely joining academics and service to others, some school districts have been able to attract a high percentage of students to the program.

Unfortunately, there is no one route that bypasses legal and logistic concerns. But the same concerns posed for community service can be directed toward athletics or other extracurricular programs. Having a football or soccer team, for example, creates potential liabilities and requires resources, and yet such teams are popular.

Programs become part of public education when educators, students, and members of the community view them as sufficiently valuable.

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***Programs become part of public education when educators, student, and members of the community view them as sufficiently valuable.***

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*Jennifer's Law: The more truth there is in what a woman is saying, the less a man will listen.*

*Jennifer Feenstra*

by Arthur W. Steller

## Synchronicity, The Inner Path of Leadership.

**By Joseph Jaworski.**

Berrett-Koehler Pub. Inc., 155 Montgomery St., San Francisco, CA 94104. 1996.

Public relations staff is often called upon to explain the actions of various leaders in their organizations. People tend to conceive leadership as the way in which individuals behave, or possess certain qualities such as charisma, or handle power struggles. The fundamental essence of leadership is often overlooked, according to author Jaworski-"...leadership is about learning how to shape the future."

Perhaps if public attention could be shifted towards leadership as the creation of new realities, our society would be better served. Communication officials could further the causes of their organizations by assisting people to understand current circumstances and how to participate "in the unfolding of the world."

The author, who is the son of Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski, leads the reader through his journey of self-discovery. By being in a state of commitment and openness, he believes we can experience "synchronicity." This condition can result in "predictable miracles," where everything comes together in unbelievable ways.

Synchronicity tells a remarkable story of a search for values and the core elements of leadership. This book will aid anyone interested in a personal quest to comprehend leadership or in explaining leadership to others.

## The Win-Win Negotiator.

**By Ross Reck & Brian Long.**

Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. 1987.

At the core of many internal communications problems in school systems is the lack of trust between management and labor, often stemming from contract negotiations. These dysfunctional relationships have the potential to reduce the pace of educational improvements down to a crawl. When adversarial exchanges are the norm, everyone loses.

The subtitle of this book is "How to Negotiate Favorable Agreements That Last." The contents certainly cover that topic well. The book is about designing mutually advantageous ways to produce positive human relationships that enhance communications.

As someone who has used win-win negotiations and has a major interest in school public relations, I can state emphatically that the following steps are the way to go. Better contracts result. Communications improve. People feel positive, and certainly "win-win."

There are four steps to negotiations that almost anyone can perform with ease. These steps include **Plans**, **Relationships**, **Agreements**, and **Maintenance**.

Establishing a win-win plan is simple. You need only to:

- Agree on your own goals
- Anticipate the goals of the other party.
- Determine areas of probable agreement.
- Develop win-win solutions to rec-

> "Southwest Airlines has employees at the top of its priorities and customers in second place."

oncile areas of probable disagreement.

Developing a win-win relationship is easy. You need only to:

•Plan activities that allow a positive personal relationship to develop.

•Cultivate a sense of mutual trust.

•Allow the relationship to fully develop before discussing business in earnest.

Forming win-win agreements is not difficult. You need only to:

•Confirm the other party's goals.

•Verify areas of agreement.

•Propose and consider win-win solutions to reconcile areas of agreement.

•Jointly resolve any remaining differences.

Performing win-win maintenance not complicated. You need only to:

•Maintain commitment by: Providing feedback based on performance, and honoring your end of the agreement.

•Maintain the relationship by: Keeping in contact, and reaffirming trust.

## NUTS! Southwest Airlines' Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success.

**By Kevin & Jackie Freiberg.**

Broadway Books, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. 1998.

NUTS! is a well-written account of a fun-loving company, which promotes a high moral purpose of being "The Low Fare Airline." The integrity and spirit are worth emulating in an organization, making this story an inspiration and a PR dream.

The public relations job for Southwest Airlines has to be **fun**, since the company philosophy for 25 years has been to have fun. For example, to resolve a legal dispute with another company over an advertising slogan, instead of going to court, an arm wrestling contest was staged for the news media. The headline for a recruiting advertisement touting comfort for employees read, "Work at a Place Where Wearing Pants is Optional." Fun at work, what a novel approach.

Unlike most companies where customer satisfaction is placed highest, Southwest Airlines has employees at the top of its priorities and customers in second place. The company culture starts with selecting people with positive attitudes and then seeing that every individual's contributions are recognized. Employees are given frequent reports on how the business works, what the competition is doing, who has performed exemplary service, and other information to keep them informed. The company's history, successes and milestones are noted. Employee birthdays, anniversaries and personal problems are all given attention by management.

The result is a 24-year history of profits, stock increases of 300 percent since 1990, a *safest airline in the world* reputation, and consistent top rankings for service, on time performance and low employee turnover. While employ-

ees work long hours and often without submitting overtime, *Fortune* magazine has twice rated Southwest as one of the 101 best companies to work for in America.

## Charisma.

**By Tony Alessandra.**

Warner Books, Inc., 1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York , NY 10020. 1997.

Some individuals seem to naturally possess a personal magnetism or charisma, which improves their ability to communicate with certain audiences. This author states that regardless of one's position and status, charisma can be enhanced through motivation, practice and hard work. School officials are not generally known for being charismatic, particularly to audiences outside of the profession.

The author's definition of charisma reads, "Charisma is the ability to influence others positively by connecting with them physically, emotionally, and intellectually." He relates charisma to leadership and energy passing to and from the audience.

The seven major components of charisma as described in this book are: your silent message, ability to speak well, listening skills, persuasive talent, use of space and time, ability to adapt to others, and your vision and ideas. Charisma is viewed as a constellation of these traits and something that goes beyond a temporary mask.

The author provides many practical techniques to raise one's charismatic quotient. These ideas are sprinkled throughout the book. At the same time, the limitations of charisma are well understood as this passage indicates:

> Being charismatic is a marvelous advantage in any endeavor. But unless it's backed up by knowledge, character, skill, experience and nobility of purpose, it will eventually be seen as the facade that it is. I'm sure you've known people who were charming, but ineffective. Or who were slick, but lacked the skill or inclination to work productively. Or whose enviable abilities were sometimes used for less than admirable ends.

School public relations officials will find this book to be helpful in their work. The essence of this work is communications, and because of that slant on the topic, it is worthwhile reading.

## The Career Chase: Taking Creative Control in a Chaotic Age.

**By Helen Harkness.**

Davis-Black Publishing, 3803 E. Bayshore Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94303. 1997.

Careers in the traditional sense may disappear in the next century. Many adults see the rapid changes affecting their jobs as negative random disorder or total chaos. This career counselor has fashioned a strategy for this difficult terrain.

A full seven chapters describe "The Pain of Change." Much of the psychological discomfort stems from a misguided faith in career damaging myths. There are 12 deadly myths, such as "Planning a career is not necessary because someone or something will rescue and direct me." The author deconstructs the myths to take the sting out of them.

One way to deal with the rapid rate of change, she writes, is for professionals to become "Chaos Chasers." The desired characteristics for the future are "control, creativity, change, challenge and competency, common sense, confidence, courage, curiosity, commitment and cooperation." This type of a professional is a life-long learner who understands change and is attracted to it.

The author provides the knowledge, self-assessments, exercises, and inspirational elements to guide readers in designing a plan for achieving success.

## Athletic Scholarships.

**3rd Edition. By Andy & Amy Clark.**

k. Facts on File, Inc., 460 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10016. 1994.

Most people have an image of college coaches lining up before the best high school athletes to entice youngsters with thousands of scholarship dollars. But this picture only fits the high school superstars in the major sports. Most high school athletes have to market themselves if they wish to gain an athletic scholarship. In some school districts, the athletes have assistance from the person who does PR for the schools.

This book can be helpful to both, because it provides a game plan for college bound athletes to use in tapping into the college scholarship bank. First, students must know how most college coaches approach recruiting. Then they must be noticed. Smart high school athletes work with their current coach, develop a quality resume and opening letter, and figure out a way to be seen in action by college coaches or scouts.

The bulk of this book is a listing of colleges, the amount of scholarships and dollars available, and those sports that give financial aid, and those that don't. Landing a scholarship is hard work. The better high school athletes are accustomed to pain and discipline, but not necessarily to marketing their talents.

## A Is for Admission: The Insider's Guide to Getting into the Ivy League and Other Top Colleges.

**By Michele Hernandez.**

Warner Books, Inc., 1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 1997.

The college admission process causes consternation among many parents. How high school professionals handle this matter can be perceived positively or the situation can become a public relations problem. This book provides a gold mine of answers for anyone involved directly—or indirectly—in the ritual of applying to prestigious colleges.

The following refrain echoes each year through the school halls and homes of many anxious families. "...Ivy League...a king of mythical vision of endless success, money and happiness, fame and fortune, success or failure. 'I'll never get a good job if I don't go to an Ivy League School.'"

The reputation of being academically highly selective contributes to the image of the Ivy League—a name apparently written by a sports writer with reference to a football league. Ironically, the Ivy League offers no athletic scholarships, but attracts those

who are first interested in education.

There is much in this book in terms of what is required to meet the difficult admission standards of the Ivy League. The entire process, including all of the specific formulas, is spelled out in detail.

For parents who wish to find the quick fix, here's the bottom line according to the author: You cannot get your child into an Ivy League school. Your child is the only person who can get into an Ivy League school.

## Management of the Absurd.

**By Richard Farson.**

Simon & Schuster, Rockefeller Center, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. 1996.

There was a form of drama made popular by Beckett after World War II called "Theater of the Absurd." The absurdity of life was part of the appeal to the audiences. From the perspective of Richard Farson, management may need the same kind of dramatic reexamination.

We all face absurdities in our work life that are frustrating and test our commitment. This author instructs that there is a difference between absurdity and stupidity in management. In the latter case, it is relatively clear as to what was wrong and how to do it better. Absurdity is illogical, unconventional, or ridiculous. Absurdity implies not a straightforward problem to be solved, but a dilemma.

Thirty-three paradoxical statements are presented and dissected. Some of my favorites include the following:

•The more we communicate, the less we communicate.

•In communication, form is more important than content.

•Listening is more difficult than talking.

•We think we want creativity or change, but we really don't.

•My advice is: Don't take my advice.

Some of the paradoxes that I personally question include:

•Planning is an ineffective way to bring about change.

•There are no leaders; there is only leadership.

Whether you agree with each of the exact paradoxes is not relevant; you are challenged to think about communications, management, leadership and organizational life.

Art Steller is book review editor. Books and requests to serve as guest reviewer may be sent to Arthur W. Steller, Superintendent, Kingston City Schools, 61 Crown St., Kingston, NY 12401.

# Photo Credits

Addresses for photographers whose work we are using in this issue

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They can supply a variety of photos for review and publication on a one-time basis for fees to be arranged depending on the nature of the use.

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# Guidelines for Submission

## *Relations*—The Journal of Educational Relations

A refereed journal—scholarly articles by academic/higher education authorities are refereed by an international editorial review board. The *Journal* also accepts articles by practitioners and administrators in basic (K-12) education and journalists at large.

## Scope

Articles are sought on topics such as internal communication and climate, employee motivation, parent involvement, partnerships, working with the news media, community participation, audits, surveying and polls, community service programs for students, communication training, advisory committees, volunteers, writing and speaking, publications, alumni associations, foundations, mentoring, photography, and related topics.

The overall goal of the *Journal* is to support efforts to enhance/foster student achievement and staff productivity, and to provide information to build public knowledge of the value and potential benefits of a sound basic education of our youth. We advocate the concept that the school public relations function must be based on fact and reality as compared to ideals and goals of educators and the community at large.

## Style

Scholarly articles can be prepared following style guidelines of the publication manual of the American Psychological Association, **with these exceptions:**

1. **Do not** place last names of authors being cited and the year within the text. Number citations sequentially in the text, provide usual citations in **references** following the article.

2. Before the start of the article, include a summary of the scope and major findings of the article in one paragraph.

We encourage you to include photographs, drawings, and tables as appropriate.

## Submissions

- Submit four copies of a manuscript with a letter from the author(s).
- Articles should be 1,000 to 3,500 words in length.
- If produced on a computer, supply a disk, clearly labeled, in ASCII format, IBM format only, with the text copies.
- Include an abstract of the article and a two-three sentence credit for each author on a separate sheet.
- Advise if the article has been published or is being considered elsewhere.
- Queries for articles on specific topics are welcomed.
- SASE. Include a #10 self-addressed, stamped envelope for acknowledgement of receipt of your article. Include a 9" x 12" similar envelope for reply to submissions or queries.
- Response to an article or a query is usually conveyed to an author within 60 days.

**Address manuscripts and correspondence to Albert E. Holliday, Editor and Publisher, *Journal of Educational Relations*, 1830 Walnut St., Camp Hill, PA 17011. 717-761-6620.**

Previous Journals are available in microfilm from University Microfilms Int., 300 Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Refer to *Journal of Educational Communications* (1975-83), *Journal of Educational Public Relations* (1984-95) and *Journal of Educational Relations* (1995-).

Albert J. DiMeo, Editor-Publisher
Journal of Educational Solutions
P.O. Box 657
Camp Hill, PA 17001-0657

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# Do You Have an Effective Team?

*by Robert D. Ramsey*

Successful teams of educators and change agents are made up of individuals who have compatible personalities, want to work together, and share the same goals; most veteran administrators would agree that effective teams can be defined with these characteristics:

- Individuals participate because they want to.
- Each team member is a self-starter.
- All members are accountable.
- Leadership within the team is shared.
- Each person participates and contributes.
- Team members are mutually supportive.
- Expectations are clearly understood.
- Members value diversity.
- Members take pride in each other's contributions.
- Loyalty is taken for granted.
- Everyone listens and shares information freely.
- Team members get along outside of work as well as on the job.

From *Lead, Follow or Get Out of the Way—How to Be a More Effective Leader in Today's Schools*. Published at $24.95 by Corwin Press, 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, CA 91320. 805-499-9774.

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